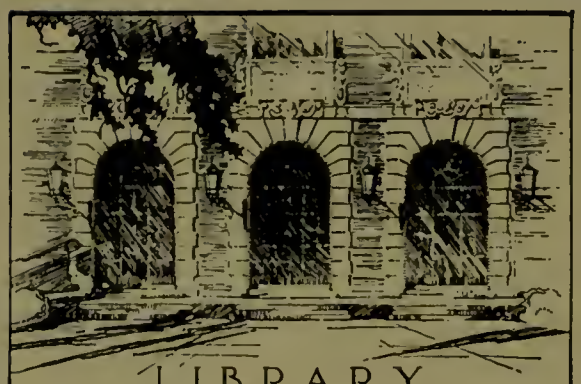

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THE WAGES OF SIN

A NOVEL

BY

LUCAS MALET

Author of 'Col. Enderby's Wife,' 'A Counsel of Perfection,' etc.

'Did we think victory great?
'So it is.—But now it seems to me, when it cannot be helped, that defeat is great,
'And that death and dismay are great.'

VOLUME II.

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BOOK III.—ST. MICHEL-LES-BAINS.

Chapter IV.

Madame Jacobini was restless. Do what she would, she could not settle off to sleep. Miss Crookenden had bidden her good-night. Mrs. Chloe had taken leave of her also, after providing her with a night-light set in a washing-basin. Madame Jacobini was funnily old-fashioned in many of her habits, and derived a peculiar sense of security from this, to most persons, very lugubrious form of nocturnal illumination. The voices and footsteps had grown silent in the garden. The electric bells had ceased to issue their urgent, irritable summons. The Hôtel et Pension Chabaud was sinking into slumber. Even Madame Chabaud herself, laying aside her vigilance with her high-bosomed stays, hung in dishabille and in weak maternal adoration over the crib wherein reposed the hope of the house—fat, rosy, warm, dimpled, his brown head shaved nearly as smooth as a billiard-ball, and his thumb stuck in between his pouting lips. The seventy odd *pensionnaires* were, presumably, reposing, like the youthful Chabaud, horizontal in their respective beds. 'Sleep and oblivion,' apparently, 'reigned over all.'

But they did not reign over Madame Jacobini. Though

horizontal in body, she was vexatiously upright, active, discursive in mind. She was nervous and feverish. She was possessed by the idea, vague yet persistent, that 'something was wrong.' Mary had been silent and distrait during the short time she passed with her that evening —had insisted on reading aloud scraps from a four days' old 'Morning Post,' on the plea that this species of entertainment would be less fatiguing to the invalid than talking. Madame Jacobini was a great talker, and, like most great talkers, detested being read to—specially when the reading in question took the form of snippets of stale news.

Her bed seemed as hot as St. Lawrence's gridiron. She turned first on one side, and then on the other; arranged and rearranged her shawls; counted imaginary sheep getting through an imaginary gap in a non-existent hedge, and indulged in other desolating mental narcotics of a like nature; yawned; wondered if anything really was wrong; wondered why Lancelot had gone off to dinner with Cyprian Aldham—(Was that the result of a sudden fit of discretion on his part or on Mary's? Of course, it was just as well such a striking pair as the two cousins should not appear alone at *table d'hôte*, the seventy odd *pensionnaires* all eyes, and ears, and comments, and surmises, looking on)—yawned again; wondered whether she should have fortitude enough to drag herself out of bed tomorrow, and mount guard over that tiresomely striking-

looking pair; dozed a little at last, only to start into more vivid wakefulness than ever at a rustling against the door.

'Who's there?' she cried.

If burglars were roaming about the Hôtel Chabaud, they might as well know she was awake, any how.

'Sara,' Miss Crookenden's grave voice answered, softly, 'may I come in?'

'Something is wrong,' Madame Jacobini remarked, with conviction. 'Yes, by all means come in.'

Mary was wearing a soft, white, Indian silk dressing-gown, plentifully trimmed with Valenciennes lace. It had flowing sleeves to it, that nearly touched the ground on either side. Thus arrayed, the girl looked singularly tall, slight, transparent even, in the vague light of the night-light, as she came forward across the bare parquet floor.

'It is too idiotic,' she said, 'but I have got the fidgets. I don't feel as though I could stay in my room alone. One of those German-Swiss women is snoring in the most appalling way next door. She would waken the dead.'—Mary moved across, put aside the muslin curtain, and looked out of the half-open window into the still summer night. Away across the garden she saw one dot of crimson light; it moved, now and again, up and down. It must be just under the mulberry-tree. She had a sudden conviction Lancelot was sitting there, smoking a midnight cigar.—'And I am not dead,' she went on, almost impatiently. 'I am quite execrably alive to-night.'

'So am I,' replied Madame Jacobini, from her hot bed. 'There must be something in the air which causes insomnia. You were quite right to come; we'll work off the fidgets together.'

'Sara,' Miss Crookenden said presently, 'do you mind my telling about something very provoking that has happened?'

'No, my dear, not the least. I am so uncomfortable in any case that a little more or less will make no difference. I am exactly in the humour to hear what is provoking.—I knew it!' she added to herself.

'This morning, when I was out walking, I met Cyprian Aldham. He asked me to marry him.'

Madame Jacobini opened her mouth wide, and brought her teeth together with a snap. The room was so far dark that she could afford to give this highly inelegant vent to her feelings.

'And you refused him!' she said.

'No, I didn't.'

'Good heavens!' cried Madame Jacobini.

She sat bolt upright in bed, while her shadow in profile—a little head and enormous, formless body, outstretched hands, and crooked, snake fingers—leapt up the wall beside her to the cornice.

'You accepted him, Mary?'

'No, I did not do that either. I temporized. I considered dear Miss Aldham—I know how she wishes it.

I considered a number of things. And then it is so difficult to say no, point-blank, unless you dislike a person very much. And I don't dislike Mr. Aldham. In some ways I like him really very well.'

'Ardent!' ejaculated Madame Jacobini.

'I asked him to wait until next April. We always go to Brattleworthy in April. I told him I would give him a final answer then.'

'Dear me!' said the elder woman. She meditated in silence for a few minutes. 'And have you any idea what your final answer will be, may I ask? It is a little hard, perhaps, to keep a man on tenterhooks for seven months, and give him an unfavourable answer at last.'

'Oh, seven months is a long while, and I may never have to answer at all! A thousand things may happen in seven months. The Last Day, which poor, dear Auntie Chloe is always on the watch for, may have come first.'

'Don't be profane,' said Madame Jacobini.

Mary leaned her fair head against the window-frame, and looked out at the dot of crimson light away in the darkness of the garden.

'I suppose in the end I shall marry him. I suppose eventually I must marry. And he will do as well as any one else—better in some respects. I know his people, and like them, and they like me. He is a gentleman; he is by no means stupid, and he is very good-looking in a certain style.'

'White-ivory-paper-knife style,' murmured Madame Jacobini.

'And he is a good man,' Miss Crookenden went on. 'I don't agree with you, Sara, about the relative degrees of virtue in men and women. I should prefer marrying a man I could look up to. I don't want to lead; I would rather be led.'

'Eh, eh!' said Madame Jacobini, her eyebrows going well up into her hair.

'And he intimated to me that he had—could have, anyhow, very shortly—plenty of money. He evidently wished me to understand, further, that there was no doubt that eventually Aldham Revel would belong to him. It is a lovely place. He let me know all this very nicely,' she added, as though wishing to be perfectly just in her statement, 'really very nicely indeed. But he did seem to think these rather important items. I wonder if he thought they would influence my decision!'—She paused.—'Perhaps he was wise,' she said, quietly, dispassionately. 'Perhaps they will.'

Madame Jacobini gave no verbal expression to her feelings. But she was distressed all the same.

The crimson dot was no longer visible. Lancelot—there was no mistaking his height, and bulk, and lazy swinging walk, even in the present almost-dark out-of-doors—came across the garden, humming softly, under his breath, the air of a certain popular setting of Burns's

'Mary Morison.' He dawdled slowly across the gravel in front of the hotel, his hands thrust well down in his pockets.

'Oh, Mary, canst thou wreck his peace
Wha for thy sake wad gladly dee?'

These words of the last verse of the song were just audible. The young lady standing at the open window on the first floor drew back. One of her flowing lace sleeves caught in the handle of the casement, causing it to swing against the wall with a rattle. Lancelot stopped humming his love-song, and glanced up. The light of the gas lamps on either side of the hotel door fell on his smooth, sunburnt, upturned face. I am not prepared to say that Lancelot's countenance lent itself to any remarkable range of expression. Its habitual expression was undoubtedly one of placid, sweet-tempered, rather sober well-being, the natural outcome of his simple, harmonious, unexacting disposition. To-night—or perhaps his cousin only fancied so, being a little perturbed in spirit herself—his expression was wistful, even sad. Disentangling her lace sleeve, Mary moved farther from the window, sat down by the round table in the centre of the room, and rested her head on both hands. The place where she had struck her forehead against the branch of the mulberry-tree throbbed and ached.

'Yes, Sara,' she said, 'Mr. Aldham gave me definitely to understand that he "had two coats and everything

handsome about him." So, if marry I must, I had really better marry him ; don't you think so ?'

But in truth, Madame Jacobini was at a loss what to think just then. She was still distressed. She was also perplexed. She reflected, as she had often reflected before, that the members of the rising generation are rather incomprehensible. They are too wise, too acute, far too reasonable. They look at life, its offers and its limitations of happiness, in such a strangely judicial fashion. Miss Crookenden's calm appraising of the man she professed herself more than half prepared to marry, struck the elder woman as painfully sensible, cold-blooded, dreary. Had the girl got no heart ? Or was her heart unawakened as yet ? Or was she doing violence to her heart out of some fantastic, mistaken sense of obligation ? Madame Jacobini was filled with vague alarms about her, vague impulsive longings to warm her into more generous, joyous existence.

'Come here, Mary,' she cried, holding out her arms, while the shadow took another leap up to the cornice. 'You look like some ghostly moonbeam in that white dressing-gown, a moonbeam that has gone astray and turned itself into a woman ; and I have never liked the moon or anything to do with it since a friend of poor dear Jacobini's—he was a musician too, had a maggot in his brain, of course, like all the rest of them—imagined, I remember, he had discovered some extraordinary secret in acoustics, and was always writing to the Home Secre-

tary, and President of the Board of Works, and a lot of other big-wigs, demanding they should empower him to reconstruct all the theatres and concert-halls in London on his infallible new system.—Well, he showed me the moon through a telescope. And it was horrible, utterly horrible! I could not forget it. It gave me nightmare for a week afterwards. Come over here, Mary, and let me take hold of you, and assure myself you are good wholesome flesh and blood, not a stray beam of light reflected off the bosom of a planet, covered with hideous dead and dying volcanoes.'

Miss Crookenden came to the side of the bed and took her friend's outstretched hands.—'You are very poetical to-night, Sara,' she said.

'That is more than can be said of you, my dear. You are alarmingly matter of fact,' the elder woman answered, with one of her wide, genial smiles.

'Oh, I can be poetical too, if I try!—"I am a butterfly, born in a bower, christened in a teapot, died in half an hour"—that is to say, most probably married at the end of seven months, which comes to much the same thing, rightly understood. Marriage is a sort of grave, Sara, in which, it seems to me, women are called upon to bury a whole lot of precious and delightful possibilities.'

'Ah, my dear!' cried Madame Jacobini. She thought of her drive through the streaming streets of Bristol, in a hack cab, with the impecunious, irascible Jacobini beside

her, upon her wedding-day. Had marriage then seemed as a grave to her, and not rather as an opening of doors into regions altogether lovely, romantic, supernal? Again she rebelled against the joyless attitude of mind of the rising generation.

'Yes, but it is,' persisted Mary. 'To begin with, marrying one man is equivalent to refusing all other men. And that in itself is an agitating consideration, for many men have merits.'

At the far end of the passage footsteps passed over the boarded floor, and the door of number twenty-two creaked a little as Lancelot Crookenden closed it behind him.

'What was that?'

'One of the servants going to bed, probably.'—Miss Crookenden knelt down and kissed her friend.—'Sara,' she said, 'should you very much mind giving up the Lakes and Venice? I should be so glad to go home. I don't feel as if I dare dawdle about with nothing to do but ask myself will you, won't you, will you, won't you marry Mr. Aldham next spring? Lancelot accused me of being changeable to-day. Perhaps I am changeable. And I'm afraid I shall make up my mind fifty thousand times and alter it again before April if I haven't something definite to do. I want to go home and work.'

'Work?' Madame Jacobini inquired, a hint of irony in her tone.

'Yes—don't laugh at me. I mean to enter myself as a

student at the Connop Trust School—you know, the De Tessier girls used to draw there—go there every day, give up society and smart frocks, and grind.'

'Dear me, this is quite a new idea.'

'No, it isn't,' the young lady asserted, eagerly. 'To-day has brought it all to a crisis—to-day has been a hundred years long. It has changed the face of nature. But the idea has been somewhere in the background of my mind for ever so long.'

Miss Crookenden's reply was slightly disingenuous. But she could not quite summon up courage to mention her interview with Colthurst, and listen to the sarcasms which she foresaw would be levelled against the oblique-eyed Tartar in his new and prophetic capacity. Colthurst's advice, warning, foretellings were a matter she purposed keeping to herself. Lancelot was not likely to speak of them. He had a great power of silence, specially regarding what appeared to him as disagreeable subjects.

'Promise you won't interfere; promise you won't object, and lodge a protest with Uncle Kent, and stir up the family to intervene and prevent me,' she went on, quite excitedly.

'I can promise nothing to-night. You have taken me by surprise—sprung a series of mines on me. I must think it over. And meanwhile, my dear, you really must go to bed.'

Mary clasped her hands with sudden violence. 'Oh,

don't send me away, Sara!' she implored. 'Let me stay with you. I don't want to be alone. I'm frightened.'

Madame Jacobini put her arms round the girl, and drew the fair head on the down pillow beside her. It was not at all Miss Crookenden's habit to give way to nervous agitations of this description. Madame Jacobini silently coaxed and soothed her. She felt sure there was something behind—that she had by no means arrived at the bottom of the whole matter yet. 'Look here, dear child,' she said presently: 'if you feel you have compromised yourself and regret it, be brave, and break with Mr. Aldham at once. If you have the slightest fear that you care—well, if you care for some one else more than you do for him, be honest, and tell him so to-morrow.'

'No, no,' she answered, wearily, 'it isn't that. Who is there to like better? Not poor Mr. Carr, who is old enough to be my grandfather.'

'That is hardly kind,' put in Madame Jacobini.

'Nor that idiotic Sir Theophilus O'Grady. Nor Ludovic Quayle. I like him; he entertains me. But he doesn't really care two straws about me. I happened to be watching him once when Lady Calmady—you remember she married that extraordinary man down in Hampshire whom Lancelot's so devoted to, and who keeps race-horses—I watched him once at Mr. Carr's when she came in unexpectedly. I don't mean any harm. It was rather beautiful, in a way, you know. He must have cared for

her very much once upon a time, and—well, that seemed to settle the question.'

'And how about Lancelot himself?' Madame Jacobini asked cautiously.

Miss Crookenden rose from her knees.—'Lance is a darling!' she said.

'Ah!' murmured the elder woman.

'But I have no more intention of marrying him—if I am to speak plainly—than I have of marrying the man in your enemy the moon, Sara. Aunt Caroline would fight to the last drop of her blood to prevent it. She is furious at his having come to see us now. She looks to Lancelot to float the name of Crookenden into the aristocratic haven where she would have it to be. Oh, and then it would not do in lots of ways! Lance would not give me room enough. He would cramp me. It is even conceivable I might get a little tired of him. He is a darling,' she repeated, with conviction, 'but he is also a wee bit of a bore. He has no imagination. He is quite too solid.'

She kissed Madame Jacobini lightly once more.

'I have been dreadfully selfish, staying talking so long. Now I will go to bed. Oh, yes, I am quite sensible again—afraid of nothing. I only hope to goodness that Swiss woman has done snoring.'

BOOK IV.—THE DRAG ON THE WHEEL.

'Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall.'—*Measure for Measure.*

Chapter I.

Perhaps the saddest poverty of all is the poverty which maintains an air of superficial smartness. The poverty which, while gradually but surely sinking downwards, makes, as it sinks, convulsive and fruitless struggles against its fate. The poverty which has not lost desire in despair, but still clutches at cheap alleviations, fly-blown pleasures, hollow yet showy joys. The poverty which makes furtive attempts at elegance, and still has energy enough left to spread its poor draggled tail in the infrequent sunshine with a foolish hope of impressing the passer-by.

To study this description of poverty it is not necessary to go on pilgrimage to the East-end of London town, or even to cross the river—that sullen, dark-robed priest, who receives so many last confessions, and closes the eyes of so many sinners, broken in heart and fortune, with his cold wet fingers.

Close against the streets and squares which, judging by their aspect in the early summer months, go so far

towards proving the truth of the old saying that 'London streets are paved with gold'—close against all this splendour, against these semi-celestial, flower-embosomed mansions, the poverty, of which I speak, flits, and flaunts, and hides, and peeps, and mimics, and hopes, and tarries, —on pavements just a little narrower, in houses just a storey or two lower—though still porticoed and stuccoed—in clothes only just a trifle less fashionable, but with a dimness and clinging odour about them indicative, in proportion to its intensity, of longer or shorter periods of incarceration in the back premises of the second-hand wardrobe-dealer.

This description of poverty is addicted to moving. It frequently changes its address. It lies abed late of a morning, and only regains a sense of security and freedom after dark. It is almost invariably in debt and in a persistent state of anxiety as to ways and means. It seldom enters a place of worship, though it contrives to show a gay face and smart garment in the music-hall or gallery of the theatre. It is generally vulgar, mean, tawdry, sensual, improvident, disreputable, incorrigible; often clever, witty, kindly, unselfish, as well. And it is always pathetic—pathetic with the desolating pathos of things mistaken and gone astray; of things by nature glad and pleasant, but through accident or wilful mis-use grown soiled and dirty; of things born with a curse of inadequacy and futility upon them—dancing, as vessels dance,

all the more merrily over the waves for lack of the ballast, that, while it would make their course a slower and more laborious one, would save them from foundering at last.

And it exists in plenty, this poverty. In its earlier stages both the charitable societies and the elaborate parochial machinery of the day, which in many directions effect such excellent work, fail, broadly speaking, ever to touch it. And so it goes its sad, laughing, weary, frivolous, profitless, way down, down, down—to the hospital ward, or the workhouse yard, or the fetid cellar; or, at best, gets back, in humbleness and, too often, in dishonour as well, to the quiet village on the seashore or among the green country lanes, whence in an evil hour, years ago, it journeyed up to town. There to wait, not without petulant outburst of anger, or fretful melancholy, or irremediable regret, till Death comes, in his mercy, to dry its silly tears, and soothe its worn nerves, and ease its long disappointment, and lull it at length into a slumber which neither duns nor desire ever again shall break.

It was to a region of South-West London, which for obvious reasons it would be invidious further to particularize, largely patronized by this particular form of poverty, that James Colthurst made his way about a fortnight after his return from the continent. He had a visit to pay, which from various causes promised to be a painful one. He had put it off as long as possible. If you are unhappy enough to have a skeleton-inmate of your private cup-

board, it is but natural that you should avoid opening the cupboard door oftener than is absolutely necessary. The cupboard door being shut, you can manage not only to look the world boldly in the face, but even to forget the ugly, grinning thing standing there within for quite long spaces of time. When the cupboard door is on the jar, or, still worse, wide open, it is a different matter altogether.

In respect of his profession Colthurst was, as we know, a genuine enthusiast. It should always be borne in mind that his father had been a celebrated divine. The saying, 'Once a priest always a priest,' holds a deeper, more scientific truth, perhaps, than is generally recognised. No element in character is more persistent than the preaching element. It survives through generation after generation. The doctrine preached by the child may be surprisingly different to that preached by the father; yet some doctrine the child assuredly will preach,—so let those that love not discourses stand from under! In Colthurst's case the stream of didactic energy which in his father had issued in fiery religious zeal was diverted into quite another channel, viz., that of passionate belief in the function of art in the social and philosophic evolution of the immediate future. The sermons of an Evangelical popular preacher, and the pictures of an ardent admirer of work of Bastien-Lepage in painting and of Walt Whitman in literature, seem sufficiently far apart. Yet it is not too much to assert that precisely the same force of inward

conviction and the same vigorous individuality which had enabled old Dr. Colthurst to sway the emotions of a crowded congregation, now elevating them to heavenly places, now depressing them with salutary terrors of regions infernal, gave to his son's pictures their strange vitality, and to the man himself his fierce necessity for the promulgation of a new artistic propaganda.

But to gain his end, to issue his propaganda with effect, Colthurst perceived clearly that the cupboard must be kept pretty tightly shut. There must be no unexpected inconvenient revelations of that fleshless countenance. And it was with the intention of taking one more look at the grisly inmate and then double locking the door, and keeping it locked—for exactly how long he did not carefully predetermine, luck might be on his side, unlooked-for events might come to his rescue—Colthurst was well just now, rested in mind and body, and disposed, consequently, to be hopeful—that he had started upon his unpleasing mission to the aforesaid region of South-West London.

Holding a large bunch of chrysanthemums in one hand, walking more rapidly as he neared his destination—not from ardent desire to arrive but from very ardent desire to be free to depart again—Colthurst turned into a crescent of drab-coloured, two-storied houses, the lower windows of the majority of which exhibited cards announcing 'furnished apartments to let.' The wind blew sharp and easterly, a first instalment of winter; and all objects at

more than a few yards distance had the flat, shadowless greyness upon them which is among the many results of wind from that most undelightful quarter. Looking along the crescent, the western sky was suffused by a dingy redness of sunset. A barrel-organ stood in the gutter, right against the kerb, about the centre of the curve of houses. While upon the dusty pavement, close by, a little girl was engaged in dancing a *pas seul* for the edification of a row of children seated, as in a stage-box, along the steps of one of the line of dreary porticoes.

As Colthurst drew near the group he slackened his pace. For the scene, in its suggestion of the seamy side of civilisation, in its sordid details, in its unconscious irony, appealed strongly to his humour. The little girl postured, attitudinized, pirouetted with almost painfully faithful mimicry of some *première danseuse* of *Opéra Bouffe.* Though small of stature, she displayed remarkable activity and self-possession. When the doorstep-audience applauded some specially startling feat of gymnastics, she swept them an elaborate curtsey in her dirty short-skirted cotton frock; or blew a coquettish kiss to the Italian organ-grinder, who, entering sympathetically, after the manner of his nation, into the artistic merit of the situation, could not restrain an occasional 'Brava!' Straws and litter, thanks to the sharp easterly draught, danced with the little girl. Colthurst noted them. He noted, too, the pinched chilly looks of the children—distressing, little

mortals, whose laughter had a harshness in it, as of men and women grown cynical from long and intimate experience of unlovelier aspects of life. One, a crippled boy, his head swathed in surgical bandages, leaned up against the pillar of the portico, clapping his red nerveless hands with impish delight, as the performer sprang high into the air and came down on the flags again,—her pale red hair flying upward from under her hat,—upon the very tips of her indifferently shod toes.

Colthurst was interested. Here was a telling subject, if faithfully rendered, for a picture of one side of London life. It is true that more than once already he had seen pictures of some such subject. But he preferred to wear his rue with a difference. Colthurst was no benevolent, middle-aged *pater-familias*, who regards childhood from the genial, sentimental, Christmas-party point of view. Not as a touching example of the pleasures of little innocents, happy in beautiful childlike fashion, showing with all the purity and sweetness of newly-opening flowers amid this barren wilderness of brick and mortar—not thus did he think of treating the subject. In sheltered homes, or safe down in the country, children of the flower-like order might exist still, perhaps. But on the London or Paris pavement, distinctly not.—These young people could not be accused of 'trailing clouds of glory' after them, he felt very sure, as they had gathered on that doorstep. They were not moving in 'worlds unrealized,' but, to use the

slang phrase of the hour, 'knew their way about' uncommonly well. And it was as a satirist—though not so much of the children themselves, poor early-wise, early-sad little creatures, as of the social order he held mainly responsible for their deplorable precocity—that he thought of transferring their knowing antics and double-edged laughter to one of his canvases.—'Call it Theodora of the Pavement, or A coming daughter of Herodias,' he said to himself.

He was about to cross the street so as not to interfere with the progress of the exhibition, when the little dancer, whose face, owing to the rapidity of her evolutions, he had as yet failed to see clearly, stood still for a moment, to take breath.—Colthurst paused, an exclamation on his lips. The child caught sight of him. She waved her hand to her audience with an inimitable air of patronage.

'You can go home, my dears,' she said. 'The performance's over for to-night.'—Then she ran up to Colthurst, all honest childish eagerness, her small, wizened face beaming, her eyes dancing with delight.—'Why, Jim,' she cried, 'we'd almost given up expecting you! It's ever so long since you've been to see us.'

Colthurst winced. He was acutely aware of the row of sharp eyes fixed on him from the door-step. Aware, too, of the insinuating bows and smiles of the organ-grinder, who, seeing the small dancer possessed such an aristocratic acquaintance, thought he might as well be paid for

his services as orchestra. Colthurst flung him a sixpence, and, taking the child's outstretched hand, walked on quickly up the street.

'Who taught you to dance like that, Dot?' he asked.

'Oh! nobody didn't teach me. But Mrs. Prust—you remember, Mrs. Prust, Jim?'

'Perfectly,' Colthurst answered.

'Cap'n Prust's got a new flag-staff in the back yard,' the little girl remarked, parenthetically.

'Has he? Well, b-but about the dancing, D-dot?' said Colthurst.

'Oh! well, Mrs. Prust she took me to the theatre a little time back, because mother was mopy, and she said it was a sin for me to be moped too. And I saw the ladies dance. Oh! it was lovely. Did you ever see 'em dance, Jim?'

'Yes—no—sometimes.'

'When I grow up I mean to be one of 'em. Do you think I ever could be one of 'em, Jim?'

'All things are possible,' he said, rather bitterly.

'And when we come back,' continued Dot, 'Cap'n Prust says let's have a bit of something hot for supper, and tell him all we'd seen. And after supper I danced in the kitchen to show him how they did it, because he'd got his gout, you see, and couldn't go. Mr. Snell was there—Mrs. Prust's cousin as lives over to Shepherd's Bush. He came and went along of us. He said he was blessed if

I wasn't as good as any of 'em. He said I danced prime.'

'Did he?' Colthurst remarked.

The little girl had reeled off her share of the above conversation very glibly, in a clear voice of remarkably wide range of intonation. Her speech was strikingly mature, like her small person, her neat features, her tiny hands and feet. There was the same energy in it as in her movements—a singular finish, too, and alertness. And this notwithstanding the bloodless look of her wise little face, for her skin was dim and blanched as that of one who has been through a period of semi-starvation.

'When you want to dance again, then, dance to Captain P-prust and Mr. Snell of Shepherd's Bush, in the kitchen, p-please, Dot,' Colthurst said. 'D-don't dance out in the street. I don't approve of it, do you hear? Those children are not nice associates for you.'

'I don't 'sociate with those children,' she answered, promptly adopting the long word. 'I just let 'em look at me, Jim—that's about all.'

'And that is a great deal too much. Look here, Dot,' Colthurst went on, taking the silver paper off the bunch of chrysanthemums. 'You shall have these if you will promise me never to dance in the street again.'

The little girl gave a long-drawn 'Oh!' of admiration, looking at the flowers with hungry eyes. Colthurst had u ng the door-bell of a house on the left hand of the

crescent, and the two, the man and child, were standing together on the step.

'Come, now, p-promise me,' he repeated.

Dot stood on tip-toe, and buried her nose among the flowers, inhaling their pungent scent with a kind of rapture. Then she whirled herself round wildly.

'It ain't fair,' she said, 'because you can see I want 'em ever so badly. And if I promise I'm bound to keep. I say, Jim, why ever are you so particular?'

Colthurst's dark face flushed.—'Will you have the flowers, Dot? You can only have them on that condition.'

The child hesitated, jumping up and down—her agitation of mind finding vent in this agitation of body.—'Oh! dear, oh! dear, I do so want 'em,' she cried. 'Can't I pay you for 'em any other way? I like the dancing, too, and you see we've no music at home.'

Colthurst shook his head.

'Then I'll have 'em. I won't dance in the street any more. I promise.'—She seized the bouquet, and then held it daintily, as though ashamed of her passing violence towards the beautiful blossoms.—'I'll promise,' she repeated. 'But I think it's rather a shame of you, Jim, to teaze and make nasty old conditions.'

As she finished speaking the house-door was opened from within, disclosing a solid female form arrayed in black—the black of economy rather than of bereavement, as might be surmised from the style of the wearer's cap.

This was black, also, but broke forth into nodding green and scarlet chenille blossoms, planted in a bed of lace, about the ears. A cap of an order, alas! rapidly becoming extinct; which, thanks to a flat silk band, slightly disguised by figured net, passing tightly over the top of the head, and by the wealth of its aural decorations, imparted a fine effect of width to the lower portion of its owner's face, making it, indeed, not unsuggestive of the human countenance reflected in the bowl of a tablespoon.

'What, Mr. Colthurst!—Never,' cried the owner of the cap.

As he stepped into the narrow entry, redolent of a penetrating odour of gas and Irish stew mixed in about equal proportions, and confronted the speaker, Colthurst knew, metaphorically speaking, that the cupboard door was opening, opening too. It had been ajar ever since he had recognised his little friend Dot in the attitudinizing Theodora of the Pavement. Colthurst felt he must wait awhile and screw his courage up a peg or two higher before he came face to face with the dreadful thing that stood awaiting him, there, within.

'How d'ye do, Mrs. P-prust,' he said, as lightly as he could. 'I'm sorry to hear from Dot that your husband has been seedy again.'

The countenance in the spoon was not an expressive one. It wore an habitual air of comfortable neutrality, as of a well-to-do cat blinking sleepily in the sun. But if

nature had denied Mrs. Prust the grace of facial mobility, it had endowed her with strong feelings and considerable power of putting them into words. It so happened that James Colthurst was in the excellent woman's black books. A brief struggle took place within her, during which she debated whether she should testify to that fact by chilling brevity of reply, or whether—the temptation was a heavy one, for Mrs. Prust was conscious of matrimonial trials of extreme severity—she should enter fully into the existing physical condition of Captain Prust. Moral principle gave way before the craving for sympathy common to woman. Let those who have nursed a gouty ex-shipmaster, blessed with an unlimited capacity for nautical anecdote, cast the first stone!

'Seedy!' she exclaimed, scornfully. 'No, Mr. Colthurst, more than that, sir. Cap'n Prust has been bad. Very bad. Gout. And rising.'—Mrs. Prust laid her hand descriptively upon the middle of her own stout person, and an ominous emphasis upon the conjunction.—'And rising,' she repeated solemnly. 'No more power in the legs than an infant. And the irritability. And, at times, the language. And yet continues to take in well, Mr. Colthurst. A little picking at breakfast some mornings; but a full meal at dinner and supper much the same.'

'That must be an encouragement to you, Mrs. Prust,' Colthurst remarked. 'A good appetite is a good sign.'

'Cap'n Prust'll last his time, sir, no doubt,' she replied.

with dignity. 'It may be short or it may be long.—There, Dot, run along like a good little maid, and show her mammy the pretty flowers.—I could mention some,' she continued, lowering her voice, blinking mysteriously at Colthurst, while she raised her fat hands in mingled protest and warning—'I could mention some whose time may very well be shorter than Cap'n Prust, judging by what they take in. Lord love you, why a sparrow 'ud starve upon it! And a kinder, more inoffensive creature, I will say, Mr. Colthurst, never came down over stairs. Keeps herself to herself. No throwing up about the past, whatever the past may be. No words. No complaints. But the tears, Mr. Colthurst, in secret. The tears and the pining. Poor young thing!'

She blinked her kind, little, grey-green eyes as though the sun shone very full in them, and shook her head until the chenille blossoms vibrated wildly.

'There is blame somewhere, Mr. Colthurst. I ask no questions. But the tears in secret, the tears and the pining. Oh! it 'ud break a heart of stone. I'm truly glad you have come back, for it's time it was all looked into. If this was to be my last word on earth'—a contingency which appeared, it must be allowed, highly improbable,—'I should say so, Mr. Colthurst. It's quite time it was all looked into, or there may be those who'll have something on their minds that won't lie there easy, or let them lie easy either.'

Mrs. Prust concluded with a strong note of indignation in her voice,—voice disclosing her West Country origin by its inclination to rise into a distinct shrillness at the end of a sentence.

Colthurst, meanwhile, who found listening to the above conversation about as pleasant as rubbing salt on a sore, had kept his eyes fixed on the yellow and white diamonds of the oil-cloth of the entry floor, while he pushed his moustache restlessly up from his lip. Now he glanced at his companion—looking, so at least that lady informed her disabled mariner below stairs, some few minutes later, 'more like a bilious fiend than anything human. Old Scratch himself 'ud have been pleasant company compared to him.'

'You are a sensible woman at bottom, Mrs. P-prust,' he said, in his quick whispering way. 'You have a good lodger who gives you very little trouble and pays you regularly. Let me advise you not to make it impossible for her to remain with you.'

And then poor James Colthurst—the lion of the year's season; the painter for possession of whose pictures dealers struggled; the man of undeniable genius, the preacher of newer and nobler ideas; the zealot filled with burning enthusiasm for truth, as he saw it, and that beauty, terrible perhaps, but illuminating, which all truth must needs bring along with it—walked on up the narrow entry, with its hideous oil-cloth, its shiny walls hung with

paper representing impossible blocks of a happily unknown description of marble, its rancid smell of gas and stew, opened the door of the room on the right and stood face to face at last with that which he shrunk from, deplored, dreaded, that which, as he feared, rendered his life rotten at the core, and clipped the wings of his fairest hopes and aspirations,—the skeleton of a dead love and a living sin.

Chapter II.

A square room, with double doors at the back disclosing a vista of narrow and not over tidy bed-chamber. Horse-hair covered chairs, the seats of them black and shiny. A sofa to match, with a Joseph's coat of many colours in the form of a woollen antimacassar thrown over either end of it in the hope of disguising the unrestful solidity of its two sausage-like bolsters. A marble-topped cheffonier, the doors of it a little unsteady as to their hinges. On the wall above, a picture of a church made of dried sea-weed, glazed and set in a broad frame composed of small shells. On the mantel-piece a pair of green glass candle-sticks, with jingling drops to them; and centrally, in the place of honour, the model of a vessel in a glass case, fondly supposed to be Captain Prust's schooner, the *Salome* of Cardiff, as she appeared off the banks of Newfoundland

after encountering what is technically known as 'a breeze,' —her masts, spars, and rigging thickly incrusted with ice, rendered in the model by a plentiful sprinkling of morsels of splintered glass. In one corner of the room a litter of portfolios and dirty canvasses piled on the top of a long, narrow, wooden sea-chest, in company with two or three dilapidated band-boxes. In the middle of the room a square table, covered by a black-and-green cloth; a tray upon it and tea-things, remains of bread and butter, a pot of canned lobster, and a plate of flaccid water-cresses.—This was what Colthurst saw on entering the dining-room of Mr. Prust's lodging-house. This, as setting to two very dissimilar figures—a tall, finely-made woman, still young, but worn, her beauty coarsened by hard living and sorrow, and a small, alert, changling-like child, whose hands were full of chrysanthemums, golden and russet and white.

As he came in the woman rose from her place at the table and stood before the grate, her head and its unruly masses of dark hair thrown back. She looked silently full at him out of wide-open grey eyes that had a dry light in them. Over her dress she wore a claret-coloured ulster; stylish—the word must be allowed to pass, since it covers the fact—in cut, but stained, frayed about the cuffs and hem, and adorned by steel buttons as extensive in size as they were defective in number. A handsome woman, but with a dinginess upon her, only too much in

harmony with the dingy room, the dingy street, visible through the window, curving away to that dingy glow of sunset behind the contorted chimney-cowls and slated house-roofs in the west. The child was dingy, too. Even the flowers, so it seemed to Colthurst, as he closed the door behind him and stood on the near side of the table, even the flowers had lost their freshness and lustre since they had passed into the hands of their present possessor. A blight was upon this place, and everything in and about it, which filled him with a loathing and unreasoning physical disgust.

A merely conventional greeting either of words or of hand-shake was impossible between these two persons—an empty form for which neither had the heart; and any tenderer description of greeting had unhappily gone out of fashion between them. So an awkward pause of silence ensued. Then the woman with a gracious movement of courtesy spoke.

'You've made the poor little maid very happy over her flowers, Jim,' she said, her expression melting into a sudden sweetness of appeal about the eyes and full-lipped mouth.

Colthurst had been living in something of a fool's paradise, seeing visions, dreaming dreams; cheating the actual by mental excursions into the just conceivably possible; indulging that riotous imagination of his in the keen Swiss air and daring Italian sunshine, while he walked over

mountain-passes, or through the deep cool streets and glaring piazzas of southern cities, his eyes greedy alike of their beauty and grandeur, their grotesque figures, their sinister historical suggestions. And through all the shifting sights, merry or sad, of his foreign holiday, through all the varying emotions, the vivid fleeting impressions, the hot race of thought and perception that had gone on within him, one impression, one vision, had been constantly recurrent. It had come upon him when he was a trifle tired and pensive, under vast silent mountain sunrise or sunset; or during the droning, incense-stuffy service in some stately cathedral, where the air seemed thick with the mystery of the supernatural. It had come upon him equally when he was in full possession of himself, mind and body; when he was vigorous, excited, moved by quick, wide-reaching apprehensions of things.—The vision of Mary Crookenden listening, responsive, drinking in his words; awakening, so he flattered himself, to a fulness of life and intention wholly new to her, as she stood in the shadow of the mulberry-tree in that sun-scorched hotel garden at St. Michel-les-Bains. He had broken down the wall of prejudice which had divided her from him. He had made her recognise him. He had established a relation with her. All this had been a matter of ten minutes at the outside. He had not seen her again—had hardly wished to see her indeed. Yet he was satisfied, for the time being at all events. For some-

thing intangible, yet actual, had, so he believed, passed between them, from him to her. That was all he wanted. He had paid off the old score, he had taken his revenge, taken it in a way at once occult and beneficent.

All this will probably appear to the reasonable and right-minded very elaborate nonsense. To James Colthurst it was not nonsense at all. It was delicious, it was inspiring. He played with the thought of it continually. He went back to it again and again, taking strange fantastic delight in the proud maidenly purity, in the reserved, almost cold loveliness of the woman whom, after a pretty sharp struggle, he had, momentarily in any case, conquered. For though Colthurst's feeling in the matter was abnormal, morbid even, it was quite free, I think, from that which is sensual or base. He did not in the least mistake the nature of his relation to Miss Crookenden. He knew well enough it was of the intellect, not of the affections. He hardly regretted that—as yet.

And now after all this enchanting careering around in Fool's Paradise, in regions mysterious and visionary; after this innocent, even, in a sense, elevating debauch of fancy, was he brought up short against a blank wall of fact. Fact gave him a blow on the head as with a pole-axe, bidding him mind what had been, rather than what might be. He had known this visit would be a pretty severe trial; but it proved worse, ten times worse than he expected. It was indescribably jarring to his imagination.

This dingy, unlovely room, the tinned lobster and flaccid water-cresses, even the not ungracefully tendered thanks for his gift of flowers, sickened him. And it was only by a very strong effort of will that he controlled himself sufficiently to answer reasonably.

'Dot got her nosegay at the price of a promise,' he said, stammering more than usual. 'I am sorry to say she was not keeping very creditable company when I met her just now. You ought to send her to school or keep her more indoors, Jenny. Dot is getting too old to run wild in the streets in that sort of way.'

'Do you hear that, Dot?' Jenny Parris asked, her face hardening again.

'I hear,' the child answered, shaking herself impatiently. 'We've been all through it once already.'

Jenny leant her shoulders back against the mantelpiece, pushed her hands down into the pockets of her claret-coloured ulster, and looked at Colthurst with a dry, half-contemptuous smile.

'I've got a nice, dutiful little daughter, likely to be a comfort to me in my lonely old age, haven't I, Jim?' she said.

At that moment, it must be conceded, Jenny Parris did not precisely embody Mrs. Prust's description of her, as the kindest, least offensive creature that ever came down over stairs. Her bearing, and the tones of her voice, were by no means calculated to appease James Colthurst. If

she had been gentle and winning with him—she could be so at times—he would have done his best to spare her, to shut the cupboard door—the old metaphor may serve once more—as softly as possible, and double-lock it without any unpleasant grating of the key. You see Colthurst was in the disagreeable position of seeing a noble life before him, to which all the higher instincts of his nature drew him with strong attraction, while a moral obligation to this woman held him back. Should he repudiate that obligation once and for all; and, looking to the greater right, which certain philosophers tell us justifies the lesser wrong, sacrifice the individual to the demands of his own self-development, which, in a sense, was sacrificing it to the good of the race? To gain a great end, should he perpetrate a trifle of immediate cruelty?

With a sudden acuteness he perceived a way of escape. Jenny should decide his line of action by her own. If she was reasonable, he would be reasonable too, gentle and merciful even; though it would, in his present frame of mind, cost him a good deal to be so. If she was unmanageable, well, then, her blood must be on her own head, she would have brought her condemnation upon herself, and his conscience would be free of offence.

All this passed through his mind in the few seconds during which he stood opposite to her, at the near side of the table. Her defiant, taunting attitude calmed him, because it went to justify the line of conduct which he

knew it would be easiest for him to pursue. So he made her no answer, but pulled out one of the shiny horse-hair chairs from its place against the wall, called Dot to him, sat down putting his arm round her, while he helped to rearrange her drooping chrysanthemums.

Jenny watched him, watched his bent head, the quick deft movements of his hands, his glances and by-play with the little girl, rapid changes of expression crossing her mobile countenance. His indifference galled her shrewdly. At last she could endure it no longer.

'Jim,' she said, 'can't you spare a trifle of notice from the child for me? It's a long time since I've seen you. One might have thought you'd have a little something to ask or tell me.'—Her speech was interrupted by a hard, dragging cough.—'Did you have a good time while you were away?' she asked, when she recovered her breath again.

'A very good time,' he answered, concisely, without raising his eyes from Dot's bouquet.

'Did you see anybody you knew?'

'Yes.'

'Men or women?' Jenny demanded.

Colthurst looked at her, and not quite pleasantly. 'B-both,' he said.

There was a silence of some minutes. Then she broke out impetuously:—'Look here, Jim, it's no use beating about the bush like this. I want to know what's to happen to us all. That's what you've come to tell, I

suppose. Let the child go—run along down to Mrs. Prust for half-an-hour, Dot, there's a good maid.'

She glanced at Colthurst significantly as she spoke, and nodded her head towards the door. But unfortunately Dot was a young lady whom it was not easy to dispose of in this unceremonious fashion. She wriggled herself up on to Colthurst's knee, nestled her small person back against his broad chest, and from that coin of vantage stared at her mother in naughty, daring challenge.

'I ain't a-going bothering downstairs to Mrs. Prust,' she said; 'Jim's very fond of me, ain't you, Jim? Mr. Snell says gentlemen gives flowers to the ladies they thinks most of. Jim didn't bring any flowers for you, he brought 'em for me. That shows he'd like to have me stay.'

'For God's sake don't take the child's part and set her up against me. She's a wicked enough little thing as it is.'—The woman spoke low and hurriedly. There was a ring of real misery in her voice.

Colthurst was touched somehow in the midst of his bitterness and disgust. He put his hand under the little girl's chin, turned her pale, wizened face towards him and kissed it; whereat she flung her arms about his neck and hugged him with extravagant manifestations of delight. Then he stood her down on the ground, though she struggled and protested, trying passionately to keep her place on his lap.

'Go downstairs, Dot,' he said, hoarsely.

'Do you mean that?' she asked. Colthurst bowed his head.

For a few seconds she waited gazing at him; the two strong wills, the man's and the child's, in opposition. Suddenly Dot turned, swept the flowers higgledy-piggledy into the lap of her soiled pinafore, gave her mother a vicious look in passing, and ran out of the room.

Colthurst got up and shut the door after her, with a certain deliberation. Then he went over and stood in the window, keeping his back to the light. The child's presence had acted as a restraint; now that it was removed he knew the bad quarter of an hour had really come. Colthurst gathered himself together and waited. He wanted to avoid making the first move.

Jenny leaned her elbow on the mantel-piece and buried the fingers of her left hand among the masses of her rough hair. The dull glow of the western sky lit up her handsome worn face and her claret-coloured ulster. She hesitated a little; but she was too anxious for much diplomacy. She went straight to the heart of the matter.—'When are you coming back here to live, Jim?' she asked.

The uncompromising directness of the question staggered Colthurst. He temporized.

'I don't know,' he said. 'I have a quantity of work in view—some orders for portraits, thanks to Carr, besides

two or three good subjects for pictures that I want to get into shape as soon as possible. I couldn't work at them here. It's impossible. The accommodation isn't sufficient.'

'You could take the drawing-room floor. It's empty. And you're a rich man, now; you could afford it.'—Again Jenny's voice had a taunting ring in it.

'Mrs. Prust's drawing-room floor is a most desirable apartment, no doubt,' Colthurst replied. 'But it is not precisely adapted for my purpose. I must have plenty of space.'

'I dare say Mrs. Prust 'ud let the bed be moved out of the back room,' remarked Jenny Parris.

The line running across Colthurst's forehead grew deep. He was nearing the point of exasperation. Clearly it was impossible to argue the matter on these lines without losing his temper fatally. He intended if possible not to lose his temper. He was silent for a little. When he spoke again it was in a tone of statement rather than of argument; for he saw that he must definitely take the upper hand of poor inconvenient rebellious Jenny Parris.

'I have further plans,' he said. 'I have a notion of founding a school and getting students to work under me, as they do in some of the French studios. What is the use of having ideas if you don't share them, don't impress them upon other minds? That's the horrible part of a great personal talent,' he went on, softening, forgetting himself and the exigencies of the situation in the satisfac-

tion of self-expression—'it dies with you. Unless you have made disciples in whom your spirit, your principles, your methods are incarnate, you leave only the corpse of your work behind you; leave it for pedants to finger and fumble over and pull to pieces, to misconstrue as only your thorough-paced pedant, with his semi-paralytic, penny-farthing intelligence, can misconstrue and misconceive the thing he gives half a lifetime to elucidate and illuminate. Do you suppose I can be content to flare away for ten years or so, as a kind of comet, with no recognized legitimate place in this cloudy, old, English artistic heaven; and then be consigned to the limbo of æsthetic experiments, æsthetic curiosities? Good Lord, no. I want to leave the living soul, not the corpse of my work behind me; a soul that will grow and develop, and be every bit as alive a century hence in my followers as it is to-day in me.—There's a grand opening for me, Jenny, if I am free to make use of it. I must go on with one picture after another till I get the public thoroughly accustomed to my style, my form of thought, my outlook on life. Yes, I mean to go the whole hog. I do propose to myself to effect nothing less than a revolution. And to do that, I must get hold of the younger men, make them believe in me, still more believe in that which I believe—stand by me, back me up, carry on my work. I will give them the ideas; they, by developing those ideas, will give me a sort of immortality.'

And the woman listened. Did more, melted with sympathy and enthusiasm, though she did not understand a tithe of what he said. For she had loved him. Poor soul, did love him still. Loved the whole personality and individuality of him, even to his oddities and eccentricities, the less as well as the more admirable effects of him—loved his rapid stuttering speech, his quick restless movements, his vehemence, his violence and precipitation; loved the restless action of his well-made hands; loved even to see him, as excitement gained him, wrench at his shirt-collar or push his moustache up away from his lip.

For affection such as Jenny's has passed the limits of a refined and discriminating taste. It has little to do with the intellect, with appeals to the intelligence, or even to the sense of beauty. It lies away back in the essences and origins of things, deeper than our meagre forms of speech. It has, indeed, no need of words to express itself. Words are only baffling and impeding to it; for it is too profound, too intimate, too single and uncomplicated to be articulate. It has small brains, perhaps; it certainly, on the other hand, has a large heart. It does not weigh, does not consider, does not think; but feels only—spontaneous, uncompromising, immediate. It is among the most beautiful, the most unmanageable, the most dangerous things the world has to show.

And so, erect, her eyes liquid, lustrous, all the dry light gone out of them, a glow on her worn face that had nothing

to do with the dingy sunset without, but with a sunrise of returning admiration and assurance within, Jenny stood listening. For this woman was generous, quick to hope, to forget and forgive. And in her faulty, impulsive nature, there was, even yet, a great longing after things pure, lovely, and of good report. Now it seemed to her that Colthurst unfolded before her a magnificent, if somewhat cloudy conception. Her whole spirit rose in enthusiastic response to meet it, dimly comprehended though it was.

'Now is my chance,' Colthurst went on, in his hot urgent way. 'And it is a glorious one, a wonderful, epoch-making one—if I am big enough to lay hold of it. The bulk of English art is like the valley of dry bones, dead, desiccated, profitless, useless—the refuse of what has been and is not; no genius, no intention, no purpose, no warmth and moisture left in it. Well, I have got to make those dry bones live. To turn them from a miserable, imbecile mockery of past beauty and greatness into a living present beauty and greatness. I have got to breathe the breath of a great resurrection into them, to make those dry bones come together, to clothe them with flesh, to make them rise up and stand on their feet—a great army, strong with modern thought, with the modern gospel of science, of democracy, of sacred, uncompromising fact. I have got to put my fingers through all the æsthetic, artificial rot and rubbish of the day, and the effete, emasculated classicism alike. What do we want with reconstructions of the

age of Zeus and Aphrodite? Or of the age of Nero and Domitian? Or of the age of Arthur and Charlemagne? Or of the miserable, pedantic artificialities of the reign of Queen Anne? They are all dead and gone, exploded, past, done with. We have moved on, thank heaven. Why call up their futile ghosts? What we want is an art up to date—the drama of love and hate, joy and torment, degradation and splendour of the men and women of to-day. To show the poetry and romance and glamour of the mind, and heart, and push, and noise, and vigorous living of to-day; that's what has got to be done. And, by God,' cried Colthurst, passionately, 'by God, I'll do it.'

And Jenny Parris stood listening, her lips parted, drinking in his words; drinking the intensity and daring of him as a thirsty land drinks in the beating autumn rain. She shook back her hair with a glad toss of her head, and answered him:—'And you will do it, Jim. You're big enough, no fear. You're strong enough and clever enough. If you give your mind to it you'm bound to win. I'd like to see the man that would try to stop you. And, look here, Jim, how can I help?'

Colthurst had been very far from talking for effect. Even in his most exaggerated moments, he was, I am happy to say, guiltless of that. The thoughts and phrases had welled up, when he was once started, with little enough direction or diplomacy on his part. Nevertheless, in speaking he had undoubtedly supposed that every

sentence would have shown Jenny, more and more plainly, the distance that separated him from her, his future from hers. And so her question fell on him like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. He was alarmed, terrified almost, at the unquenchable loyalty which made her thus claim her place again at his side. How could she help? Only in one way; and to point out that way was brutal in face of that same loyalty. Colthurst paused, amazed, in a sense confounded; filled with a sudden dreadful fear that he should find it impossible to shut the cupboard-door and hide the grinning skeleton after all.

Jenny mistook the cause of his embarrassment.

'Oh, I know,' she said, bridling in proud apology, 'I'm not the woman I was. We've been through pretty rough times together, you see, Jim, and they've left a bit of a mark on me. I've lost flesh ever since I've had that plaguing old cough of nights. My arms are poor,' she added, stripping up the sleeve of her ulster and of the dress beneath it, and contemplating the arm—white and muscular, but as sadly angular at wrist and elbow—with a pathetically reproachful expression.

Then she glanced at Colthurst, a fine candour, an absence of all bitterness in her face, as she continued:—

'But you know, Jim, I haven't been very happy lately. There's been nobody to please and keep going for. Dot's the most perverse little mortal that ever stepped this earth. She's just delighted to plague me; and if I say a word

she turns round as impudent as you like, and laughs. There's no being upsides with her. And you seemed to have changed, Jim, and taken to fine folks and fine ways I knew nothing about. I'm afraid I've had nasty grudging thoughts about you—wished you'd never painted the "Road to Ruin" and the "Evening of Labour," and made yourself a great man. I fancied I liked the old starvation wages best, but if I see you haven't really changed, Jim,' she added very sweetly, in her incurable hopefulness—'if we can have the dear old times back, and a little more comfort into the bargain, a little more to wear and to eat and drink, why, I shall soon lose my cough and get my looks back—I'm only nine-and twenty, after all.'

Jenny's voice was slightly unsteady. There were tears in it, though she smiled.

'You d-don't understand,' stammered Colthurst, in terrible perplexity. Revolt, rebellion, defiance, would have been easier to deal with than this.

'Why, why, surely,' she went on, gently, 'I ain't so changed as all that? And you'd have no trouble to get younger models for heads and hands and so on, now you can afford to pay them. They'd be glad enough to be taken up by a man with a name like you. As to feet, well, upon my word, there's no model in London, not even Annie Sutton, or that little Italian Giacomelli girl Walter Creighton's always painting, can beat me for feet.'

Colthurst was silent. Her voice became very unsteady again.

'I should do as well as the lay figure, any way for the clothes and drapery,' she said. 'You know how I can stand, Jim, by the hour together—and things look so woodeny on the figure—I should do for that.'

Colthurst stood biting his moustache. 'Let us sit d-down and talk it all out quietly, Jenny,' he said at last. 'I b-began at the wrong end of my story, I'm afraid, and misled you. You don't understand. I want to explain the practical, common-sense part of it to you.'

Jenny scrutinized him searchingly for a moment. Then she flung herself down in the leather-covered arm-chair by the fire-place. The sunset light had faded from the sky, and in the grey uncertainty of the dusk, the room looked meaner and uglier, and the woman, checked in the midst of her generous fresh enthusiasm, looked gaunt and old.

'Go on, Jim, then,' she said, curtly. 'Explain.'

But it was just all Colthurst could do, under the circumstances, to explain.

'I have taken a studio down in Kensington,' he said. 'It is large. It has two fire-places in it, so that if I carry out my plan of getting a few students to work under me, I could put up a partition for a time, and shut off a portion of it for myself, till I could afford to build. They could work in the larger half of it, and——'

'You mean to live down there,' interrupted Jenny Parris.

Colthurst heard his own heart beat in the pause before he answered.—'Yes,' he said. And the word seemed to him to drop like a stone into a black, deep well.

Jenny sat very still for a few seconds.

'I shall be sorry,' she said, slowly, looking steadily at him, 'to leave Mrs. Prust. She's a good, kind creature, and the old gentleman's wonderfully fond of Dot.'

'I d-didn't propose that you should leave Mrs. Prust at present.' Colthurst turned and glanced out of the window, along the curve of the dreary street. 'There would be hardly proper accommodation for you and Dot. There are only three rooms, besides the offices, attached to the studio.'

'I've lived in two rooms for a good number of years now,' she replied, quietly, 'excepting when I've lived in one. You needn't be so tremendously considerate of my comfort, Jim. I'm not too particular. I could manage—for a time—till you can afford to build—as you say—till then, you know.'

Then Colthurst grew a little mad. It is such situations as this which push even good-hearted and conscientious men into cruelty, into crime even. But one idea, that of self-preservation—which meant the preservation of his genius unshackled, of the possibility of carrying out his convictions and great purposes unhindered—was upon

him. He came across from the window and stood in front of her.

'Is it conceivable,' he asked, 'that you don't recognize that you and the child being there would simply ruin me? It could not be kept dark. Every one must see, every one must know it. Just the people I most want to get hold of would resent it most hotly; would consider it an unpardonable scandal and outrage. Are you to open the door to my sitters? Am I to risk their running over Dot ballet-dancing to a barrel-organ on the doorstep? Don't you see that it's out of the question, unpermissible, absurd?'

Jenny Parris rose to her feet. She was trembling so violently that she had to catch hold of the corner of the chimney-piece for support.—'My God! after all these years, you're not going to cast us off, Jim?' she cried.

'Cast you off—what have I ever said about casting you off? Of course not. You shall have your allowance, and I'll settle just as usual with Mrs. P-prust. And, when I can, I'll come, as I have to-day, and see you.'

Jenny put up both hands and thrust back her hair.

'Oh! it's not the money, it's not the vile, wretched money I want,' she cried, passionately. 'Do you think thirty shillings a week and the lodgings'll pay me for my happiness and my health and my good name? There's only one way to pay me for mun, Jim, and you know that. And you've promised me, scores and scores of times over.

Make an honest woman of me, Jim, and save the child from shame, and give her a chance. She's your own flesh and blood, Jim. And somebody's told her, or she guesses. She's as sharp as a needle. Oh! she's a wicked little thing! You heard the way she threw off at me about those flowers.'

Jenny came closer to him, her face working with strong emotion, all blanched, distorted, ghastly, in the chill evening dimness. She laid her hand imploringly on his arm.—'As you'll have to answer for your deeds one day before God Almighty——'

Colthurst instinctively tried to shake himself free—to draw back.

'Yes,' she repeated, wildly, 'as you'll have to answer then—now, before it's too late—before success and money and fine company have turned your head—before you've lost all your liking for me—before—before you've lost your heart, Jim, to some of those grand ladies that pet you, and flatter you, and crack you up—marry me, Jim—marry me—there isn't a woman among them all 'ud ever be the wife to you I'd be.'

Jenny put both hands on his shoulders.

'Why, Jim, Jim!' she cried, with heartbreaking earnestness, 'don't you understand you're just everything in the wide world to me? I love you, man——'

She paused, her speech broken by a gasping sob.

'I love you now as I loved you when we loitered in the

combes above dear old Beera, in the evenings, years ago; and heard the gulls laugh and the pheasants call, and the breeze slip up through the tops of the oak wood, and the beat of the surf on the bar across the bay, and the cry of the men and the rattle of the cable, when the skiffs came in and took up their moorings back of the pier, waiting for the tide to bring 'em in to quay.'—Jenny let her hands drop at her sides, and tossed her head back with a sudden, sobbing laughter.—'You know what's happened since. Luck's been against us, and times bad. But I love you, Jim,' she said, 'I love you; that's all. There's nothing more to say.'

But, alas! from Colthurst's point of view there was much, everything more to say. On the one hand was this woman's affection for him and his obligation to her—an obligation which he knew he was discharging at least as fully as most men discharge such obligations. On the other hand was his career, his mission, his unsatisfied rage of living, and the haunting aching sweetness of a pure and ideal love. Must he sacrifice all these to poor Jenny Parris?

And it must be remembered that Colthurst knew the worst as well as the best of her. Knew her loyalty, her outbursts of unselfish devotion; but knew equally her hot temper, her jealousy, her radical incapacity for the strain of a well-ordered manner of daily living, knew the element of coarseness in her nature, knew her light-mindedness and vanity, knew her want of tact, knew her recklessness

when in good spirits and her general unmanageableness when in bad. Knew that this impulsive, half-educated woman could never become a real companion and help-meet to him, could never take her place in the social circles in which he intended to move; knew that she was incapable of helping him forward, supporting him, climbing upward by his side. Earlier she might, perhaps, have done so, for there had been a singular quickness and adaptability in her; but it had given way under the hard and demoralizing conditions of her position.

All this Colthurst knew. Let us be just to him. And it was not only this, for he had a more bitter complaint against poor Jenny than any of these—a complaint which he tried never to formulate, even in silence, it filled him with such loathing and disgust. He had hoped it might lie buried for ever out of sight and remembrance; but now, in his excitement and perplexity, now in his growing fear—fear that the woman would soften him, get her own way, and so keep him for ever enslaved—now, in his extremity, he turned and struck her with the hideous weapon with which she, unhappy yet—in a sense, for we must be just all round—heroic soul, had by her own action furnished him.

'Jenny,' he stammered, under his breath, 'I can't marry you. You remember that time, three years ago, in P—Paris. You know what I mean. That was too much. I can't marry you. You know why.'

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Colthurst was pale, too. They were very terrible, those two white, human faces, close together, looking into each other's eyes in the dingy London dusk, a knowledge between them of something too pitiful, too vile to put into words.

If, in speaking, Colthurst had anticipated an outbreak of denunciation, he was mistaken. Jenny took a long, choking breath, closed her lips rigidly, drawing herself up to her full height. She was nearly as tall as Colthurst. Now, in the growing obscurity, she seemed to loom up before him, a grand, dark, tragic figure, wrapped about by the solemnity of an unalleviable woe.

'You can go, Jim,' she said. 'We've had it all out now. I know what you mean. You know why I did it. I couldn't let you and the child starve.'

'Better have let us starve ten times over than keep us alive at the price of such shame,' he answered.

'Would you have said so then?'—Jenny put the question with a queer mixture of avidity and mockery.

'Yes, you know I should,' Colthurst answered, very quietly, 'if you had given me the chance.'

Again love triumphed in Jenny.—'I'm glad, then,' she said, 'I didn't give you the chance.'

There was a brief silence. The woman was the first to speak.

'You can go, Jim,' she repeated. 'We've had it all out now. You can make your mind easy. I shan't hang

about the fine new studio down in Kensington, and put your sitters about, and ruin your prospects. Only remember this, Jim, if you should happen to take a fancy to one of those fine ladies—you said there were women among your new friends as well as men—and make up to her, and try to marry her, well, I warn you she'll see me first. She shall hear the whole story, and then if she likes to have you she may.'

Jenny moved slowly across the room as she spoke. Her knees gave under her, and she laid hold of the furniture in passing to steady herself. She sunk down on the hard black horsehair sofa.

'There, go,' she said, 'go, Jim, like a good fellow. I've had about enough.'

Some ten minutes later Mrs. Prust knocked at the door with a view to the removal of the tea-tray. This, by rights, was numbered among the duties of Serena, the sharp-eyed, youthful general-servant of the establishment. And, for once, Serena had displayed alacrity, not to say ardour, in her readiness to step upstairs any time during the last hour and bring the tray down. But her mistress, with more than one cutting remark as to the hatefulness of poking, and prying, and curiosity generally in girls who took no more than six pounds a year wages, announced an intention of fetching it down herself. In truth the worthy woman was bursting with impatience to know the result of the 'bilious fiend's' visit, and to ascertain whether her lodger's satanic

acquaintance had acted on her advice and 'looked thoroughly into it all.'

When Mrs. Prust bustled into the room, Jenny was still sitting, dry-eyed, on the hard sofa, in her stained, frayed, claret-coloured ulster, her hands lying idle in her lap.

'Why, my dear, good soul,' cried the landlady, her well-cushioned person coming into sudden and sharp collision with the corner of the table, 'whatever be thinking of sitting alone in the dark? You'm mazed, sure-ly?'

In intimate conversation Mrs. Prust laid aside fashionable conventionalities of diction, and relapsed into the idiom still prevalent in Devon.

Something in the familiar accent, in the comfortable, kindly, fussy presence, touched a very tender chord in poor Jenny Parris's battered heart.—'Oh, Mrs. Prust!' she said, 'let the tea-things bide and come here. Sit down by me a bit, and give me your hand. I'm in deep waters, the floods have gone over me.'

She stopped abruptly, interrupted by a fit of coughing, which shook her strong frame painfully.—Mrs. Prust, meanwhile, murmuring something profoundly incoherent concerning 'poor young things,' 'inoffensiveness,' 'Old Scratch,' and 'lozengers,' for one of which objects she, at the same time, instituted a vigorous but unsuccessful search in the pocket of her dress.

'It'll pass in a minute,' gasped Jenny. 'I get it like

this, often by night.'—She paused for breath, and then continued slowly—'Sometimes I think my time won't be long here.'

'There there, now,' said Mrs. Prust, soothingly, shocked at this confirmation of her own prognostications. 'My dear soul, don't be fretting about such things as that.'

'But I don't think it will,' Jenny repeated. 'When I feel like I do to-night, I should be more glad than sorry to know I should go soon. It's a cruel, bad world, Mrs. Prust. And see here, I won't deceive you. I've been no better than I should. I ain't what's called a respectable woman. I've gone pretty low. But don't turn me out, Mrs. Prust, there's a good, kind body. Help me a bit. Not with money,' she added, under a swift fear of misconception; 'I shall have enough, some way or other, of that. But help me with the child. She's fond of the Cap'n, and he's good to her. If I go, you'll remember her, won't you—she's got no friends but you—and not lose sight of my poor little maid?'

The landlady pressed her hand in silence, save for a gurgling and choking, very really, if inelegantly, indicative of sympathy. At last she quavered out—'Don't you werry, my dear. While I'm above ground she'll want for nothing. And I must say, even when most irritable, Cap'n Prust's as set as never was on little Dot.'

Chapter III.

Early in December it happened that Professor Sylvester, the Royal Academician who presided over the Connop Trust School, fell ill. He caught a bad bronchitic cold; stayed at home, went to bed and got up again fully persuaded of the necessity of passing the remainder of the winter in Sicily, or at all events on the Riviera. Good Mr. Barwell, the under-master, meanwhile, was far from enjoying his hour of supreme command. Not that he grumbled at the increase of work it brought him; but that his modest soul was harassed by conscientious fears of the inadequacy of his own powers. He trembled lest the school should suffer. In moving terms he implored the School Council to come to the rescue, and rig up a mock sun of some description, until such time as the legitimate Royal Academic rays should again pour their cheering influences upon the sixty and odd students now under his sole tuition. But at such short notice even a mock sun was not easily procurable, every painter of standing being fully occupied with his own pictures for the spring exhibitions. Adolphus Carr, deputed thereto by his fellow council-men, proceeded from studio to studio in vain; and the last day of term drew in sight with Mr. Barwell, still revolving in unilluminated loneliness, wringing his hands.

It was at one of Mr. Carr's Wednesday afternoon parties that Colthurst first heard of the dilemma in which the Connop School found itself. Colthurst had a standing invitation to these parties, and during the last six weeks had availed himself pretty frequently of it. Not that his love of society had suffered any appreciable increase; but that at Mr. Carr's there was always a chance of meeting Miss Crookenden, and to meet Miss Crookenden again was a growing desire with him. An impression may be strong, but, almost in proportion to its strength, it craves for renewal, for the satisfaction of contact with that which produced it.

And to-day, it seemed, fortune was disposed to smile on Colthurst, and grant him the renewal he desired. For on entering the first of Mr. Carr's suite of handsome rooms—that gentleman occupied a very good flat in one of the large red mansions that have sprung up of late years along the western portion of the Embankment—one of the first persons he remarked was Madame Jacobini. She was ensconced on a sofa, just by a wide, elaborately-draped doorway. Her eyebrows were elevated, her plain, clever face full of expression—she had on a black bonnet with dash of yellow in it which suited her admirably—and her hands were busy in gesticulation as she conversed vivaciously with Mr. Clement Bartlett, whose playing of Captain Dulcimer, in 'A Quarter to Eight,' triumphantly justifies—so say his many friends—the high opinion they

have always expressed regarding his dramatic talent. It is unsympathetic, it comes near being discourteous, to differ from your friends in opinion. Mr. Bartlett was guilty of no such discourtesy. His own opinion confirmed that of his friends, confirmed it really generously. With the result that, just now, he presented to Colthurst the spectacle of a supremely self-complacent back.

Mr. Carr, meanwhile, standing at the entrance of his dim, crowded, carefully lighted, luxuriously-furnished apartment, immediately after greeting his newly-arrived guest, embarked in a recital of the woes of the Connop School. He was full of the subject, so full that for once in his life he overflowed—overflowed to the detriment of discretion, which got a lot of the starch washed out of its neat, self-respecting, little person in the process.

'It really is very much on my mind, Colthurst,' he said, with mild seriousness, in his most admirably confidential manner. 'I volunteered at the last Council meeting to do my best to secure a *locum tenens*. I have been very much interested in the school from the first, you know. I have the honour of being one of the trustees of the Connop Trust, and I have always been most anxious that the schools benefiting by the endowment should maintain a high standard, and offer a solidly good artistic education.'

'They are less r-rutted in prejudice than the Government schools—one can say that for them without hesitation,' Colthurst put in.

'Ah! I am glad you think so!'

Even Colthurst's complimentary speeches appeared to Mr. Carr suggestive of sudden and involuntary collision with some hard and very angular object. Colthurst in conversation affected his mind as driving over a jolting road would have affected his body. Mr. Carr paused a moment, and drew one lady-like hand down over the back of his head to soothe his jarred nerves.

'I really have taken a very great deal of trouble in this matter of a *locum tenens.* I was perfectly ready to do so; but I must confess the result has been discouraging, almost annoying to me. It has been an unpleasant revelation to me of the lack of public spirit—I must say so—among the professional brotherhood, Colthurst. One man after another has refused. And it is most embarrassing, really anything but pleasant, to meet with a series of refusals. But this morning I thought my vexations were at an end—that I had secured Walter Creighton. I ought not to say that he actually bound himself by a promise; but his tone was most encouraging. I have just received this telegram from him.'—Mr. Carr held the square of pink paper by one corner, and tapped it reproachfully with his forefinger.—'He says, "Extremely sorry, but find it impossible on further consideration to undertake work."'

'I don't know that Creighton's teaching would have b-benefited your students very much. He is hopelessly hide-b-bound by the great classic superstition,' Colthurst

said, while his eyes roved restlessly over the company assembled.

—There was Mrs. Frank Lorimer, all innocence, and in an irreproachable gown from Paris. There was Antony Hammond's neat, beardless face, increasingly rotund person, and air of studied yet invincibly easy good-humour. There was Miss Dampier, bright-eyed, high-coloured, in general effect like an aged gossamer, undulating with admiration in front of Caminada, the new tenor. How sincerely Colthurst did not like that expansive spinster! He hoped to goodness she might have no opportunity of undulating in front of him before the afternoon was over.—

Ah! I think you are always inclined to be rather hard on Creighton,' Mr. Carr rejoined, suavely, remonstrant, and very sensible of another jolt. 'Like most ultra-Liberals, you know, you exhibit decided traces of illiberality in some directions, Colthurst. No one so autocratic as the Socialist—you must pardon my saying so—at heart. Now you cannot deny Creighton's drawing is fine—very fine. Of course, I grant you he is decorative, a little too much led away by his taste—and a most refined and exquisite taste it is—for decoration.'

'He has never p-painted a picture in his life as far as I know, only fitted figures and accessories into many feet of canvas, as you might fit a pattern on so many yards of calico, taking care to fill up the corners nicely.'

Mr. Carr shifted his position slightly. His conversational spine really quite ached from the jolts. He sheered off from the apparently rather dangerous subject of Mr. Creighton, taking refuge in the superficially safer one of the masterless condition of the Connop School.

'It is a pity Mr. Barwell is so diffident. You know him? Excellent man, most amiable and painstaking. I have the highest respect for him; but his want of self-confidence amounts to a misfortune—a positive misfortune in the present case. For I believe, myself, he is perfectly competent to carry on the school single-handed for a few weeks. You see, happily, there is no question of resignation on Sylvester's part. I have no doubt we shall have him back after Easter, possibly sooner. We merely require a stop-gap.'

Colthurst's eyes still roamed restlessly over the dimly bright rooms.—There were Mrs. Carmichael and her two handsome, well-groomed daughters. The younger one was laughing a little, trying hard not to laugh too much—though she has such pretty teeth—at something Mr. Evershed—he is a clerk in the Home Office—was telling her. There was Horatio Deland, the thought-reader, too, whose lank black hair and rather verdant complexion are so uncomfortably suggestive of a rough Channel crossing. He was talking to Miss Hattie White, the smart little American who plays the banjo.—

'I have applied to every one I think the least likely to

help us,' Mr. Carr added. 'I really am at a loss to know what further steps to take. This telegram is very annoying—very.—Ah! Duckingfield, how d'ye do? Delighted to see you. I was just telling Colthurst about our difficulties at the Connop School. Walter Creighton——

But the repetition of Mr. Carr's woes was lost upon Colthurst, for at last Miss Crookenden had come into sight. The young lady emerged from the dining-room and advanced slowly across the inner drawing-room. She had a tea-cup in her hands, and Colthurst judged it must be somewhat over-full from the careful way she carried it. The centre of the room happened to be vacant just then; he consequently had an uninterrupted view of her. Her close-fitting blue-gray gown, bordered with beaver, was stiff in front from throat to hem with silver embroidery. Her shadowed fair hair was surmounted by a hat or bonnet—it would be presumptuous to specify which—blue and silver too, the distinct form of it not unlike that of a little winged helmet. Arrayed in this suit of fairy-like armour, Mary Crookenden appeared even more than usually seductive. Her moonlight beauty gained a certain dainty edge, a hint of delicate audacity from her costume. She was lovely, and there was a sort of challenge—refined, but very sufficiently provoking to the spectator—in her loveliness.

Beside her was a man whom Colthurst did not know, but whom he perceived to possess all the unconscious

indolence which comes of very good breeding. He was tall and slight. His neck was rather too long, and his shoulders sloped rather too much. He must have been over forty. He had a remarkably beautiful mouth. Apparently he found favour in Miss Crookenden's sight, for she talked to him quite gaily as she came slowly down the length of the room. Apparently he found favour in Madame Jacobini's sight also, for she welcomed him with one of her widest and most genial smiles as he offered her cream-jug and sugar-basin to complete the joys of the cup of tea Miss Crookenden had brought her. Self-complacency meanwhile, became less aggressively evident in the general expression of Mr. Bartlett's person. His glory seemed to wane slightly under the almost pedantic courtesy of the other man's bearing.

As Colthurst watched the little group his spirits did not rise. He had his desire. There was Miss Crookenden sure enough—Miss Crookenden animated, gracious, gay, her graceful figure thrown into high relief by the massive russet draperies of the doorway behind her, her silvery breastplate as she moved giving off scintillations of white light. She had never looked more engaging, but never, alas! seemed more inaccessible, further away. For Colthurst recognised, more clearly than he had ever done before, how she was hedged about by wealth; by the pretty queenship of her acknowledged beauty; and by those unwritten laws of social privilege which in theory

he so despised, but which in practice he had to admit are so tyrannically potent in the ordinary conduct of life. And then he asked himself savagely to which world he really belonged—which for him held the final and permanent issues in its grasp.—The world of Mary Crookenden, proud and brilliant as she looked in her suit of fairy-mail, unassailable in the bravery of her spotless maidenhood? Or the world of Jenny Parris—Jenny, worn and degraded—Jenny, in her soiled, stylish ulster, with its frayed cuffs and missing buttons—Jenny, pitiful, though in a way splendid, wreck of unruly passion and of sin? The question was a hard one, and Colthurst was over-worked and harassed. He answered it in a pessimistic spirit. He was penetrated by a sullen conviction that the final issues would be cruel—that they would prove evil, not good.

But that conviction—since, while life and reason are whole in us, we all, by inherent necessity, try to restore the balance and failing one mode of consolation take refuge in some other with ingenious haste—that only threw Colthurst back upon the fixed idea of his great artistic propaganda. If in some directions the roads were blocked, if in some departments he was foredoomed to sorrow, then the success of his work, the promulgation of his artistic gospel became indeed of infinite moment to him. It was all he had left. More than ever he thirsted for the satisfaction of making it obtain and prevail. And then suddenly his recent conversation with Adolphus

Carr presented itself to him in a new light. Here was an opportunity of preaching his gospel ready to hand.—His spirits rose. His decision was swift. If the Council would appoint him, he would take the place of the disabled professor of the Connop School himself. 'Barwell might be a little scared, but he wouldn't offer any opposition. And it would be delicious,' he said to himself, 'delicious to plant the standard of revolt right there, in the heart of the enemy's camp.'—He turned hastily, an alacrity in his manner, to broach the subject to Mr. Carr.

But that gentleman was busy greeting a fresh influx of guests. Colthurst had moved aside absently, in his desire to get as complete a view as might be of Mary Crookenden; and now he discovered he had landed himself in a corner, that he was hemmed in between the end of a grand piano and the rather excessive developments of a highly ornate fireplace, while a small army of well and ill-dressed backs intervened between him and his host.

The nearest of the said backs belonged to Antony Hammond; and Colthurst, I am afraid, was disposed to be rather uncharitable towards that agreeably good-tempered minor poet, as towards all persons who ventured to regard life from a facile, light-hearted point of view. In his present humour, half-morbid, half-ardent, Hammond's attitude of permanent amusement was anything but sympathetic to him; and to avoid being compelled to address him, he moved still further into the

semi-obscurity of the corner. But the corner was a small one. He could not help overhearing a good deal that was said.

And as usual, Hammond had plenty to say. He was particularly happy, for he had just encountered a friend of very long standing who was an extremely attractive woman to boot. Some circumstances, moreover, connected with her piqued Hammond's curiosity shrewdly; and the gratification of his curiosity was to Hammond, it must be owned, an inexhaustible source of entertainment. He was the least snubbable of men. He proposed to permit himself the indulgence of asking two or three questions.

'This is delightful!' he exclaimed; 'as delightful as it is amazing. What has procured us this honour? What has induced you to visit our sublunary sphere, Lady Calmady? But that I have this moment had the privilege of shaking your hand, and that I found it reassuringly substantial and resistant, I should be tempted to believe myself in the presence of one of those astral bodies Horatio Deland has been descanting on at such desolating length. Will no philanthropic soul catch that poor demented being and clap him into a lunatic asylum? He really is not fit to go about loose. He is more tedious than a debate on the Irish Question, a missionary sermon, or a cold in one's head. But to return to this delightful surprise you have given us—from whence, my dear Lady Calmady, and for how long?'

However much Colthurst might be absorbed in personal matters, it was impossible to him to be ignorant of his surroundings. His brain was a sensitive plate which could not but receive and retain pretty vivid images of all presented to his eyes. Moreover the name Hammond used, arrested his attention. For he had heard—who indeed has not?—of the strangely romantic marriage made some years ago by the lady now bearing it. A marriage so strange in some of its aspects, that a vast number of people have asserted that no one but a not very nice woman could ever have had the courage to make it at all. There was an element of weirdness in it such as appealed strongly to Colthurst's imagination. He glanced at Lady Calmady with a quickening of interest; and the impression he received was a distinctly uncommon one. For, to put it concisely, now, as when some twenty years ago Sir Richard Calmady first had the extreme good fortune to meet her, she suggested a singularly enchanting cross between a Greek nymph, a Scotch deerhound, and a very well-bred Eton boy.

'I came up from Brockhurst this morning,' she said, in answer to Hammond's question. 'I go down to-morrow by the four o'clock. I was forced to come up—at least my maid told me I was—to do some shopping. And as I was passing I thought I would just look in and see how you were all getting on.'

'Oh, we are all trotting down the inevitable way in

much the same order as of old,' he rejoined lightly; 'some trot faster than others, and that usually rather against their will, I fancy. Carr, perhaps, keeps as even and moderate a pace as any. But we all trot.'

Lady Calmady had seated herself sideways on the arm of an easy chair. Her attitude perhaps was slightly unconventional. She lolled; but she lolled as a long-limbed, delicately-made lad lolls, or as Daphne may have lolled by the reed-grown banks of Peneus in Thessaly, ere the god loved, and pursued, and for ever lost her amid the green leaves of the sweet-scented thickets of myrtle. As Hammond spoke she smiled, and her smile held a very noble revelation of character. Her upper lip shortened, her eyes narrowed a little and quickened into wonderful sweetness and tenderness of expression. The faithfulness, the pathos, the finely-tempered strength of this woman's nature manifested themselves with a radiant directness in her smile.

'Ah, that trotting!' she exclaimed; 'it's a nuisance, isn't it? Yes, we all trot, more's the pity. For my part I don't care to talk about it.'

Hammond whirled the string of his eye-glass round his finger. He was charmed.

'The situation remains unchanged then? You are not in the least bored yet then?' he permitted himself to say.

A shade of displeasure crossed Lady Calmady's face. But Hammond was an old friend; and then too his im-

perturbable good-temper obtained him pardon for many speeches that trod rather hard on the heels of impertinence. Lady Calmady's upper lip shortened, and the clear sky shone out again in her beautiful smile.

'Dick and I are as great fools as ever, thank God,' she said, quietly. 'And so I can't but be sorry for the trotting. When the present is full of content, as good as it well can be, the slowest pace seems a lot too fast.'

Hammond looked at her in silence for a moment. And his thoughts wandered away to a certain slim, upright maiden lady nearing middle age, who wears out level, uneventful days among learned books and small inglorious duties in a reposeful country rectory. Even the most mercurial of mortals have their moments of insight and consequent twinges of regret.

'Ah, you blissful married people ought to be put a stop to somehow,' he cried, almost impatiently. 'You make the rest of us feel so abominably dissatisfied at times. It really is very difficult to forgive you, for you produce in one the detestable suspicion that one may after all have missed the very heart of the whole matter.'

And Colthurst, leaning his elbow on the end of the grand piano, alone as you can only be alone somehow in a crowd, gazed out of his dark corner sadly enough. For Hammond's tone had a ring of sincerity in it which made Colthurst feel quite amiably towards him for once, and pardon him those cheerful, futile, gnat-like dancings up

and down in the social sunbeams which generally struck him as so irritating.

'Poor little Dot!' he said to himself, suddenly inconsequently. 'Poor little Dot!'—But his mood hardened again almost immediately. Ambition gained over sentiment.—'Art remains,' he went on. And his mind turned longingly in the direction of those sixty and odd professorless students at the Connop Trust School.—'Even in one term I might do a good deal, might sow seed it would not be easy to root out.'

He drew himself up, again looking for Adolphus Carr. It would be best to speak to him at once, and then depart. What was the use of lounging here, exciting, provoking himself by the contemplation of Mary Crookenden, her splendours and successes?

Unfortunately, Mr. Carr was otherwise engaged, not to be had. Assiduous, confidential, he was occupied in conducting the steps of Lady Theodosia Pringle, and those of her amiable, anxious, squat-figured, elderly daughter in the direction of refreshments. These two ladies are a stable quantity at a certain section of London entertainments, and Colthurst knew them well by sight. No one pursues her social duties with more praiseworthy pertinacity than Lady Theodosia. But providence has seen fit, in its inscrutable wisdom, to deny her a large income. She therefore pursues them gallantly on foot; unless the weather is phenomenally atrocious, when she has been known reluctantly to bestow her alert and upright person

in an omnibus. She, consequently, habitually arrives at her destination furnished with a healthy appetite and a pair of questionably clean boots. Colthurst recognised that he must resign himself. Lady Theodosia's repast would take time. And he did not care to follow his host into the dining-room. To do so would oblige him to pass close to Miss Crookenden, and to pass her would be to speak to her. He did not want to speak to her; he wanted, indeed, very honestly to put her altogether out of his head. If Naboth's vineyard can never be yours, is it not a palpable folly to hang over the wall of it, and whet appetite by plucking here and there a stray grape? He determined to remain where he was until Carr should come back. Meanwhile, he fell to planning about the Connop School; even, in imagination, to haranguing its sixty and odd students.

Unluckily, just as he had warmed up pleasantly to that same haranguing, and was cannonading away in denunciation, sarcasm, high faith, full-bodied, resonant periods, a speech of Lady Calmady's very effectually claimed his attention. She was standing close to him, Hammond still beside her. Colthurst could not see her face now; but he could not, however much he might have wished it, very well avoid hearing what she said.

'Oh! that's Miss Crookenden, is it, talking to Mr. Quayle! That's interesting. I have heard a good deal about her one way and another. She is not quite what I

had imagined her, though. But then the descriptions from which I constructed my idea of her, though highly complimentary, were, I own, slightly confused.'—Colthurst felt Lady Calmady was smiling. She hesitated a moment, and then added:—'Look here, Mr. Hammond, you know her, and you hear all that's said. I don't ask out of mere gossipiness, I think I am justified in asking. Tell me, who is she going to marry?'

Hammond had regained all his usual lightness of demeanour.

'Who indeed!' he exclaimed. 'There you open up a fine field for speculation. The aspirants are as the sands of the sea for multitude, and the young lady, though most adorable, is also not a little capricious. Heaven forbid I should speak disrespectfully of so charming a person. Pray understand I report merely in obedience to your question. I assert nothing. But the wicked declare she is rather addicted to the pastime of taking scalps, which is our refined modern way of putting the old formula, breaking hearts.'

'Ah! I am sorry for that,' Lady Calmady said softly.

'Never having been guilty in that line yourself,' put in Hammond gaily. 'Well, the last victim who has undergone the small operation I have just alluded to is poor little Sir Theophilus O'Grady. You know him? Not an impressive figure, yet I really was stirred to compassion for him three days ago, when I found him at the club,

biting his nails down to the quick with rage and wretchedness, because, after smiling encouragingly upon him through last season, our young lady had just flatly refused under any conceivable circumstances to share his patrimonial peat bog and chances of being shot by a loyal and devoted tenantry. As for the others, I myself, Lady Calmady, have trembled more than once on the edge of the abyss. Even our honoured host is declared by some to have had his hours of delirium in which he contemplated the immolation of a happy and honourable bachelorhood on the altar of matrimony. Mr. Quayle's attitude, I think, speaks for itself, I may spare myself the exertion of dilating on it.'

Hammond, here, permitted himself a pause and brief inspection of Lady Calmady's countenance. He had a theory that no woman, be her marriage ever so happy a one, quite relishes the spectacle of a former worshipper paying court to another and younger than herself; and that romantic passages took place long ago between his companion and the gentleman he had just mentioned is a matter of history. I am delighted to say Hammond's theory received no additional confirmation on the present occasion, though. He was almost provoked. Lady Calmady so very evidently, as he said to himself, 'did not turn a hair.'

'We are further disquieted by rumours of a good-looking young country clergyman with prospects. I

observe his existence is invariably justified by immediate allusion to the prospects,' he continued. 'Then there is that estimable, young Samson, the first cousin'—

'Ah! we won't laugh at Lancelot Crookenden, please, Mr. Hammond,' Lady Calmady said quietly. 'At Brockhurst, we are all very fond of him. He is one of the very best of good fellows. Behind his silence and simplicity there is plenty of character. He rings true, absolutely true.'

Hammond whirled the silver string of his eyeglass round his finger.

'Fortunate youth to have secured such an advocate,' he exclaimed, piously. 'We can then be in no doubt now as to whom Miss Crookenden should marry. Yet so blind are even the most adorable young ladies, sometimes, to their own highest good, that I fear your original question as to whom she will marry is nearly as far from being answered as ever, Lady Calmady—especially if she has, as the wicked assert, that little weakness for scalps. But she seems to be moving. Will you let me have the privilege of presenting her to you? Shall we come?'

Colthurst, penned in his corner, had found the above conversation anything but flattering to his self-esteem. He called Miss Crookenden by the hard name of coquette. He suffered a movement of—in his own opinion—very righteous anger against her. For in that half-fanatical egotism of his, he accused her of having seduced him from the

straight path of his own most sacred convictions. Had he not pledged himself to preaching the average, and was not Miss Crookenden about as far from an embodiment of the average as need be? She belonged to that small minority to whom this world offers a playground, not a workshop. She was—I quote his rather extravagant form of statement—a mere foam bell on the crest of the wave of artificial civilization. She was a decorative adjunct, nothing more. The underlying Jacobinism in Colthurst took fire. He greatly questioned whether a merely decorative human being is not worse than a superfluity, namely an iniquity; whether a creature at once so expensive—you had only to glance at Miss Crookenden to assure yourself that she represented an uncommon amount of expense—and so useless, ought to be permitted to exist at all. It required no effort of the intelligence to see she was lovely and be moved by her loveliness. Had he not just heard the extensive list of her admirers? They were not, to his thinking, persons endowed with any astonishing degree of mental capacity. Colthurst began to rate himself for having behaved both faithlessly by his creed and unworthily by his intelligence, in having yielded so readily to her charm, in having so persistently entertained the thought of her.—But there was his host back again at last, having succeeded in appeasing the pangs of Lady Theodosia's hunger. Colthurst emerged from the obscurity of his corner.

'L-look here, Carr,' he said, stammering a good deal in his eagerness. 'I have been thinking over that difficulty of yours about the Connop School. I am willing to undertake it myself. You may t-tell the Council so. If they choose to offer me the post, I will accept it. And supposing any d-difficulty arises as to terms, as to the payment of a substitute, I am prepared to give my services. I don't think Sylvester's illness ought to be a tax on the school. If he claims the whole of his salary, I will waive the question of remuneration.'

Alas! poor Adolphus, what unlooked-for pitfalls beset the path of even the most diplomatic of men! For Mr. Carr had recounted his woes in all innocence, never dreaming that the recital of them would provoke this rejoinder. It had not occurred to him to think of Colthurst as a possible candidate. He had taken for granted he was far too busy to be able to afford to offer himself as a stopgap. Consequently the proposal took him wholly by surprise. Moreover, as Colthurst stood before him, dominant, urgent, his eyes with an odd, restless light in them, his face with a strange ravaged look on it, even Mr. Carr's polite indirectness gave way. He made a mental reflection and that a distinct one. There was a lurid sort of splendour of intensity about the man, yet surely this was a very singular shepherd to invest with supreme authority over that flock of sixty and odd students, male and female, at the Connop Trust School!

'Ah! you are too generous, really too generous, my dear Colthurst,' he said, veiling embarrassment under an excellently civil show of enthusiasm. 'Your offer is positively princely.—Good-bye, Deland. I hope the *séance* will go well on Friday, and all sceptics be converted. So good of you with all your engagements to make time to come.—Yes, as I was saying, Colthurst, it is positively princely. At the same time you must not be public-spirited to the point of forgetting your own interests, you know. In mentioning our difficulties I was very far from intending to trade on your generosity to this extent.'

Which was perfectly true. Mr. Carr passed one lady-like hand down over the back of his neatly-curled head. To make use of a vulgar expression, he found himself very much up a tree.

'You must not come to a decision in a hurry, you know.—Ah! Miss White, going? Well, I am sure we are all deeply in your debt for the pleasure you have given us this afternoon. Some of those plantation songs are gems, perfect little gems.—Yes, you must consider your own interests, my dear Colthurst. The school-work would necessarily make heavy inroads upon your time. And with those two pictures on hand—most promising powerful pictures they are in my opinion; I have great hopes of them if you will allow me to say so—and with that portrait of Duckingfield too, you really must think twice before encumbering yourself with the Connop School.'

'I have thought twice,' Colthurst answered. 'I have been through all the pros and cons. The pros have it. It just amounts to this, Carr, I want immensely to have the school.'

Oh! the joltiness of this conversational road. Our discreet, accomplished, elderly Cupid felt sadly shaken.

'I am sure the Council have reason to be greatly obliged to you for your handsome offer,' he remarked a trifle vaguely.

'You will let them know at once?'

'We have a Council meeting to-morrow afternoon at which I lay the results of my mission before them.'—Mr. Carr passed his hand down over the back of his head again thoughtfully.—'And I can only repeat that you are most generous, Colthurst; but if by chance you should happen to see the matter in a different light to-morrow, don't scruple to telegraph.—Ah! Madame Jacobini, you going too? Must you really? I am sorry. Caminada has just most kindly consented to sing. I wanted you to hear him, and I know he is very anxious for your verdict himself'——

'Mr. Colthurst,' said Mary Crookenden, in her sweet, grave voice; 'will you permit me to recall myself to your remembrance?'

The young girl's proud eyes looked straight into his, the fairy armour gleamed and glistened. Colthurst tried to harden himself against the charm of this exquisite taker of scalps. Tried—yes, it had come to that already.

Why, in heaven's name, couldn't she let him be? Why must she indulge in this wanton bit of coquetry? He asked himself the question with a kind of rage as he bowed silently before her.

'Then certainly I had better depart with all possible despatch'—this vivaciously from Madame Jacobini. 'For Caminada, poor young man, wouldn't in the very least relish my verdict. I have heard him sing already—went through the ordeal a fortnight ago at the Frank Lorimers'. Weedy, weedy little voice, Mr. Carr. No substance in it. Will never do for the stage, believe me, never.'

'I have wished to see you for some time,' Mary went on, with serene gravity. 'I have wished to thank you. Probably you have forgotten all about it, but you were kind enough to give me some advice when we met abroad this summer.'—She paused in very pretty enquiry. 'You may remember?'

'Yes, I r-remember,' Colthurst said.

'You told me to study. I have obeyed you. I am studying.'

Miss Crookenden's eyes dilated. Her expression was touched with a certain gladness, a certain elevation of sentiment. Her fair, young beauty rose into stateliness, into something very near grandeur just then.

'I have never known how much life could be worth before. I am very happy, and I am very grateful to you,' she said.

'Mary, Mary,' broke in Madame Jacobini, huddling her

furs about her angular shoulders, 'pray come. That wretched brougham must have been waiting for hours. Pray remember we have to drive home, and dress, and dine, and be at the Haymarket by half-past eight.'

There was a frost. The horses' hoofs struck sparks from the stones of the crossings. The lamps burnt with a small, clear flame. The sky was free of cloud, and the stars, keenly bright, sent out sword-thrusts of cold light. Colthurst had business at a well-known artist-colourman's in Long Acre. Crossing St. James's Park, he paused on the bridge spanning the ornamental water. The whole scene, looking towards the Horse Guards and buildings of the Foreign Office, seemed laid in in every shade from steel colour, through blue and blue-purple to positive black. The roar and roll of the streets was loud, culminating from time to time in the yell of an out-going or in-coming train. A detachment of soldiers marched down Bird-cage Walk, the regular tramp of the men forming a ground tone to patter of drum and shrill squeal of fife. Some water-fowl on one of the islands awoke, fell into commotion and launched forth a noisy fleet, leaving diverging trails of whiteness on the surface of the water as they swam. And the north wind blew piercing, strong and tonic, undefiled by the smoke or human reek of the vast city. It rattled the bare, black branches of the trees, and struck the iron-work of the bridge as with the slap of an open hand.

Colthurst drank it down open-throated. After those warm, luxurious, crowded rooms, its chill was very welcome. He felt uplifted, strengthened, courageous. It came to him as a Wind of Promise out of the infinite distances of the dancing, star-scattered, blue-black winter night. It told him that the final issues would not be cruel, that for him they would not prove evil but good. It told him his delicate fancies were rooted in fact, that the imagined relation was a real one; that it was true, not false, his words had found entrance and stirred the spirit of that fair woman into nobler, fuller life. It might suit the purpose of light-minded men to conceive her light-minded as themselves. But Colthurst knew better. He alone had divined her aright.

'Oh! there is fire,' he said to himself exultantly, going back on his old thought of her, 'plenty of fire underneath the snow.'

The patter of drums and squeal of fifes, the tramp of marching feet, died away in the distance. The waterfowl, reaching the other shore climbed up with sleepy quackings, leaving long bars of rocking, steel-edged ripples to mark their track. The four quarters chimed, and then Big Ben boomed out the hour, seven, from the Clock Tower. And that strong, clean, untamed wind, a wind as it seemed of promise, still rushed out the uttermost north, bringing good tidings, bidding fear and distrust to cease, calling aloud that the world comes round

to those who can dare even more surely than to those who can wait.

Did the wind lie? No, for nature never lies. But like other oracles, hers, alas! often bear a hidden meaning, and find fulfilment which seems to the seeker sadly far away from the first-heard plain song of her speech.

Chapter IV.

Colthurst got the appointment. His offer was accepted in courteous terms. He was glad, gratified. The more he thought of it, the more it seemed to him this was just the opening he needed. Whether, however, his satisfaction would have been so great had he known the whole history of the appointment is doubtful. For the Council had not arrived at their decision without perturbation and anxious discussions, which were not superabundantly complimentary to the subject of them. They had deputed Mr. Carr to find them a convenient King Log. They feared he had, in fact, found King Stork, long red legs, active bill, and all the rest of it. They hoisted danger signals, the older and more conservative among them; spoke of realism, of subversive ideas; feared Colthurst was terribly modern, regrettably young; wailed, in chorus, that he was guilty of that supremest iniquity in the eyes of the respectable English citizens, the iniquity

of being unmarried. They pointed out, moreover, that the conduct and practice of the school had already been the subject of criticism and comment on the part of persons given, like Dean Swift's 'nice man,' to the entertaining of 'nasty ideas.' They foresaw that this appointment would give occasion to the enemy, in the form of the British Matron, to blaspheme loudly.

Yet how could they refuse with civility? How with any show of reason find any excuse for declining, while Mr. Barwell still continued revolving solitary, wringing his hands? That good man, moreover, in final desperation of diffidence had greatly accentuated their difficulties by threatening actual resignation unless a mock-sun of some sort was got into working order without further delay. To accept King Stork then, or close the school—here were the two alternatives. After careful deliberation they chose the former. But of all this Colthurst fortunately knew nothing.

Mr. Barwell's mild countenance, meanwhile, from out its setting of sparse, wavy, gray whisker, appeared to emit a gentle radiance. He was immensely relieved. He looked like a lean and faithful dog which, after long searching, has found its master. There was, if I may say so without indelicacy, a distinct effect of tail-wagging about him. He was thrilled, too, and fluttered. Nights among the flies in the Rhone Valley, days among the salvias in the Alpine pastures come back to him. Erro-

neous principles and diabolic cleverness, to return to the phrase of his own particular revered Royal Academician, bodily present enthroned, in the heart of his beloved Connop School. To Mr. Barwell this was simply tremendous. He crumpled his long, angular person together on the top of the omnibus which would convey him to town, outside the semi-detached villa at Hampstead—the parrot-nosed sisters watching from the dining-room window, over the top of the wire blind—that raw, foggy January morning, the first of term, with a sense of positively audacious adventure, of unlimited intellectual and emotional electric shocks ahead. For this estimable man of over fifty went forth to meet his new *chef* as a modest young maiden goes forth to meet the lover, of whom, though he fascinates her, she is more than half afraid.

Owing to the atmosphere of uncertainty which had enwrapped the affairs of the school during the vacation, there was to be no opening ceremony at the commencement of term. The Council judged it wisest that King Stork should enter upon his career in the frog-pond quietly, silently, without preliminary flourish of trumpets. Colthurst arrived on the scene early, not caring to run against any of the students until he met them in his official capacity. He betook himself to the office, a bare and businesslike apartment opening on to the flagged hall. The Connop School occupies one side of the inner quadrangle of the new buildings of the College, the high

blank back wall of its large drawing theatre being a marked feature in the otherwise monotonous uniformity of Wentworth Street. The office and hall just mentioned are on the first floor, and are approached by a rather handsome flight of steps, in the centre of the *façade* of the quadrangle on the left. The drawing theatre, equal to two stories in height, is on the ground floor; and in the further corner of the office a door gives access to a narrow stone and iron balcony clinging, high up, in the inside wall of it.

Colthurst sat down at the office table. He was conscious of being somewhat nervous and excited. He was in little doubt as to the ultimate result of his relation to these sixty and odd students. He intended getting very complete possession of them; but the process of getting must necessarily take time. It could not be done at first sight, in a minute. And meanwhile, before the day was out he knew he would have to run the gauntlet of a good deal of pretty trenchant criticism. Instinctively he steeled himself against possible opposition, detraction, even a possible flavour of insolence in the bearing of all these young strangers. He meant to carry the school; but the half-morbid attitude of his mind made him fancy it more than possible he might have to carry it at the point of the bayonet.

The morning grew increasingly foggy. Mr. Barwell, armed with the mollifying ointment of his deferential

manner, came in for brief consultation. The model had arrived, so had the greater number of the students. But alas! outer darkness invaded the precincts of the theatre. What did Mr. Colthurst think? It was annoying, of course, to be compelled to open proceedings in an irregular manner; annoying that the new director should be introduced to the work of the school under other than its normal conditions; still it seemed a pity to waste the greater part of the morning waiting on the chance of the fog lifting. Would it not be best to decide on a plan of operations at once? Light the gas and give a time-sketch?

In his present humour, waiting was quite the last thing Colthurst cared about.

'I should be uncommonly g-glad to get to work at once,' he replied, leaning his elbow on the office table, and looking up at the tall, amiable, Don-Quixote-like man who bent over him—one hand under his coat-tails, the fingers of the other thrust in between the buttons of his white waistcoat. For Mr. Barwell, whatever the season of the year, invariably marked his sense of the occasion by putting on a white waistcoat.

'I feel a little like shivering on the b-bank,' Colthurst went on. 'I shall be uncommonly glad to get the first plunge over—you understand? Any arrangements you can make which will enable me to take the header soon and have done with it, will be rather a blessing.'

The under-master shuffled off; his countenance still emitting a gentle radiance. Outside in the hall, he rubbed his lean, long-fingered hands together, with a movement of inexpressible satisfaction. He found the contemplation of his new *chef* positively engrossing.—'He is so amazingly alive,' he said to himself. 'So amazingly, astonishingly alive.'

Meanwhile Colthurst, to fill up the time and keep his sense of nervous impatience within bounds, began reading through the list of students' names, lying open on the office table. First the tri-weekly ones, mostly ladies, none amongst them whom he knew. Then the daily students. The names were arranged alphabetically, and it so happened that he began at the bottom of the page and worked upwards, repeating them mechanically, idly, half-aloud.—'Eliot, William Jenner—Douglas, Alexander—Dicksee, Agnes Kate—Dexter, J. Hablot—Crewdson, George Owen.'—And there he stopped. For the letters, forming the three words standing on the next line above as he glanced at them, performed a queer little war-dance right across the page, and when they settled back into place again were edged round with half the colours of the prism. An excitable brain, such as Colthurst's, not infrequently plays its possessor these eccentric tricks of vision.

'Crookenden, Mary Coudert,' was what he read when the words ranged themselves once more in sequence.

Colthurst was on his feet with a sort of flash. For a minute he stood staring at the open list lying on the office table. Then he began walking restlessly up and down the room with that quick, quiet, cat-like tread of his. Truth compels me to state that his first feeling was anything but an admirable one. It was little more than the alert, savage joy of the hunter who sees the game he has long been tracking within easy range at last. The Wheel of Fortune as it turned brought about unlooked-for combinations! He found this fair woman, who had seemed so remote, so inaccessible, suddenly by such unlooked-for combination given into his hands. He could see her every day, speak to her every day. If he was careful, watchful, cool enough—and Colthurst just then felt equal to anything—he might develop the fantastic relation he believed he had established with her almost indefinitely. He might learn by heart, not only the outward aspect of the woman, but the aspects of her mind and heart likewise. He might learn the secret of her nature—for each nature has its secret, and till you have learnt it your dealings with that nature are necessarily blundering, bewildered, superficial, incomplete. Having learnt it he might play upon her mind and heart as on some delicate instrument. He thought of Lady Calmady's question and Hammond's answer. Thought, exultingly, how deliciously chance had given him the whip-hand of all the crowd of aspirants to the young lady's favour. Thought with

peculiar pleasure of the discomfiture of that insolent, thick-witted, young barbarian, Lancelot Crookenden. This then was the meaning of the message of the Wind of Promise, blowing keen and free from among the dancing winter stars out of the blue-black north.

The fog hung like a rusty curtain of crape against the tall office window. The door, already mentioned as leading on to the narrow balcony, was ajar. Colthurst could hear Mr. Barwell's voice at intervals issuing civil, apologetic, conciliatory orders in the theatre below. Could hear a scraping of chairs on the boarded floor, a rattle and slam of easel-trays let hastily down into place. Then a scurry of footsteps across the hall without, echoing on down the spiral stone staircase, accompanied by whistlings, a laugh, snatches of talk in cheery young baritone voices. The opening of a door immediately underneath, a certain confused noise caused by this incursion of male students into the theatre.

Almost unconsciously, hearing these things, Colthurst's mood changed. They brought him back to actuality. His movement of blind, unreasoning satisfaction passed. His feeling rose to a higher plane. And in that rising the inherent dangers and difficulties of his position began to reveal themselves. What had he taken the school for? Not to gratify private desires or promote private ends but that he might preach a gospel which he believed to be a true and saving one. From this standpoint Miss Crooken-

den's presence presented itself less as a triumph than as a temptation. The unlooked-for combinations brought about by the turning of the Wheel of Fortune were not, alas! without an element of irony.

'Carr ought to have warned me,' he said to himself. 'If I had known she was here, I should have withdrawn my offer.'—But in this matter poor Mr. Carr was not really guilty, for he had not known of Miss Crookenden's presence himself. Save on gala days his acquaintance with the school extended no further than the board-room—the Professor discouraging all visits to the studios during working hours. While Mary had rather carefully abstained from giving her friends any clue to the manner in which she elected to spend her time just at present. She had enjoined silence on Madame Jacobini, moreover.—'Don't talk about my going there, Sara,' she had said. 'Then if I do get tired of it and give it up, nobody will bore me by asking why, and obliging me to confess to being, what Lance is pleased to call "changeable," and so make me look foolish. I detest being made to look foolish.' But of this Colthurst was ignorant. He, therefore, fell fiercely upon poor Adolphus in spirit, and mentally tore that somewhat flimsy, though well-preserved person to tatters.

A rending of Mr. Carr asunder, however, was but the briefest of episodes, occupying but one turn across the office and back again. It left Colthurst where it had

found him—standing morally opposite to a strangely ironical dilemma, and physically opposite to the half-open door leading on to the stone balcony. Restlessly, in obedience to a longing for anything that had in it a semblance of escape, he pushed the door wide open and stepped out on to the narrow space. Then stood silent looking down at the scene. In his experience it was a familiar one enough. He had witnessed it, or something analogous to it, hundreds of times already. But familiarity had little influence over Colthurst's imagination. Custom failed to blunt the edge of his perceptions, by rendering that which was familiar also of necessity stale. And to-day the scene held a peculiar meaning and value for him. Dilemma or none, it still was big with hope.

The red-walled theatre looked vast and mysterious under its fog-darkened skylights. There was a telling violence of contrast between the clinging gloom above, and the vivid yellow-tinged glare of the big hooded lamp—the long metal pipe of it writhing down like some huge, black serpent, out of the obscurity of the far-off ceiling—all the strong, uncompromising light of it concentrated on the low platform, where stood the model. A supple, broad-featured, ox-faced young Italian, curly-headed, stripped, save for the blue and scarlet scarf twisted about his loins. Beautiful, but with the sullen, gross, unintelligent beauty that has got a very little way, as yet, from the beast. His feet were planted well apart.

His right arm, and the upper part of his body were thrown forward, as making a lunge in fencing, causing the muscles of back and shoulder to stand out firm and taut under the lustrous skin, from the effort of enforced stillness. Round three sides of the platform a space of boarded floor. Then a semicircular, woodentopped, railing. And beyond, following the outer curve of it, a forest of close packed chairs and easels; and a company of young men and women, sitting or standing amid an intricate network of sharp-edged light and shadow, cast by the great horse-shoe of gas-burners just over their heads.

Yes, to Colthurst, standing on the narrow balcony gazing down at it, the scene was big with hope. The nobler and baser instincts in him, the intellectual and emotional sides of his nature, wrestled together fiercely just now. For he asked himself, honestly and straight,—hope of what? Should this great, red-walled, fog-dimmed room, with its cunningly directed lights—with the still, strained, naked form of the model, too, in which he saw symbolic suggestion of the sacrificial victim, without whom the rites would be maimed and incomplete—should this be to him the temple in which he, as flamen, would teach men to worship worthily his immortal mistress Art? Or should it be to him only a house of love, dedicated to the adoration of a very fair, but yet a mortal mistress—a mistress from whom, in his saner hours, he knew himself to be divided, not only by wide difference of surroundings and

circumstance, but by a moral gulf, which he could cross only over the body of the mother of his child, the body of the woman who should have been his wife?—The struggle was violent, as Colthurst stood there, gazing down. He was conscious of it, acutely, distressingly conscious of it. But as the seconds passed, the nobler instinct gained. Art claimed him first; and to conduct her worship worthily, he must keep himself free, as far as possible, from sentimental perturbation. And then, his attitude towards Mary Crookenden herself, began to alter. Inaccessible, surrounded by friends, protectors, admirers, she had been fair game. He might dare as he liked, try experiments, do his best to dominate her, and secure her recognition. The advantage remained hers. She was well able to protect herself. But now the parts were reversed. The advantage was his. All the latent chivalry, all the sweeter, gentler elements in Colthurst's strangely complex temperament arose, and called aloud to him to control himself, to restrain himself, not by word or look to compromise her.

'And yet it is hard, very hard,' he said to himself—'just now with this undreamed-of chance given me.—Oh! Jenny Parris, Jenny Parris, what a different world it would be for me to-day, if you and I had not let the flesh and the devil get the upper hand of us ten years ago. You've a lot to answer for.'

And then somehow the remembrance of little Dot came

across him, little Dot dancing to the droning sound of the barrel organ on the dreary pavement, among the litter, and dust, and whirling straws.

'And so have I,' he added with a movement of genuine remorse, 'God forgive me—so have I.'

'Ah, I see you are taking a glance at the school, Mr. Colthurst. The numbers are creditable, really very creditable, considering the bad weather, don't you think so?'

The under-master leaned his long back against the door-way, and gently rubbed his hands together under the tails of his coat. He loved the Connop Trust School as a father loves his child. He wanted the child to be praised. Further, he had a general and most delightfully agitating expectation of fireworks. He wanted Colthurst to go off, so to speak. His little remark represented the application of a mildly tentative match. Poor man, if he had but known, not innocuous toy fires, but fires wholly volcanic and destructive were in full play very close to him, just then.

Colthurst, not without an effort, dragged himself up from the floor of his private pandemonium and answered absently.

'Yes, it's an excellent school.'

Both as praise and as fireworks this was disappointing. It did not amount to very much. Mr. Barwell struck another match.

'A new model is always a little incentive to diligence,'

he said. 'And a time-sketch gives a pleasant flavour of competition to the work. Then to-day we have the extra incentive of a new directorship you see, Mr. Colthurst.'—A perceptible suggestion of tail-wagging came on.—'Every one here is anxious to produce a favourable impression upon you. We are in no doubt at all as to the ability of our new master, and we are very anxious to oblige him to think highly of our abilities in return.'

But the powder must have got damp somehow. For again Mr. Barwell was disappointed. Colthurst showed no signs of going off. Indeed, tentative matches and the mollifying ointment of flattery alike were wasted upon him at this moment. His own entry upon the balcony, there high up in the gloom, had been so noiseless that it had passed unobserved. But now, at the sound of voices, a slight movement was perceptible among the students in the theatre below. First one face and then another, flashing into momentary distinctness, had been upturned towards the speakers. The better, nobler side of Colthurst's character was still in the ascendant. It had triumphed so far. Yet he could not help scrutinizing each face in turn with a certain avidity. Then at the far end of the semicircle of easels, he suddenly caught sight of a woman's blonde head. He stepped back into the office.

'We'll go and l-look at the work upstairs in the antique, if you p-please, Mr. Barwell,' he said, stammering badly all at once.

Thus, not with greedy devourings, but with purpose rather of stern and praiseworthy self-repression, did King Stork enter on his reign in the frog-pond.

Chapter V.

Perhaps the inherent force of a nature is shown even more in its passive and negative, than in its active and positive self-expressions. In its power of voluntarily limiting its own horizon; of setting itself arbitrary boundaries; of saying, 'thus far will I go, see, admit, and no further.' For it takes a lot of latent strength to sit, either mentally or physically, really still. Not to fidget. To 'stay put,' in short.—And it was precisely this, mentally and emotionally to sit still, to stay put, that James Colthurst proposed to himself at this juncture. To live altogether in the present. To limit his horizon, and focus his eyes so as never to see beyond it. To fix an arbitrary boundary, across which his steps should never wander, even in thought. The term at the Connop School comprised about twelve weeks—Easter falling late that year. And the end of term constituted Colthurst's horizon, constituted the boundary he had fixed. After that? He permitted himself to ask no such question. After that probably, in some form or other, the Deluge. But like many persons of strong desires and large purposes, he

was something of a fatalist. He did not, therefore, waste and hamper the present by anxious efforts to get ready salvation-arks of gopher or any other species of wood against that possibly diluvian future. If the Deluge was to come, come it most assuredly would. Meanwhile sufficient unto the day was the evil, and likewise the good thereof.

And the days just now, in one direction at all events, had much good in them. Colthurst very soon got those sixty and odd young people, all of them, that is to say, worth the getting, very well in hand. Those who had any wit or gravity of purpose in them he dominated intellectually. Those lighter creatures, in whom gravity was lacking, he carried along with him by the mere momentum of his personalty, as a big boulder rolling down the hill-side carries the little loose stones. It is not too much to say that by the end of the first six weeks he possessed the school, had it at his feet. He inspired warm admiration and enthusiasm. He did not inspire friendship. The conquering natures, I think, rarely inspire that, though they frequently inspire passion.

And so all went well. The very monotony of the daily round of work soothed him. Deference and attention mitigated his irritability. Mr. Barwell, too, was always at hand with offerings of mollifying ointment. Colthurst's old dreams of influence and mastery were coming true. His sheaf stood upright, while the sheaves of those about

him did obeisance. And yet, somehow, he was not very elate.

For the effort to observe limitations was a severe one, it produced queer results. And Colthurst was of the number of those persons who have an almost maddening capacity for registering their own sensations. At times the continued effort worked him up to a pitch of emotional excitement which only violent physical exercise could calm. He walked half across London sometimes at night; seeing strange sights, meanwhile, witnessing the sordid, grotesque and various pageant of the streets of the great city as it can only be witnessed when reputable humanity lies safe and warm in bed, and disreputable humanity performs its moral and spiritual dance of death, unrestrained save by the advent of the very occasional policeman. At other times the effort induced in him a certain languor, a kind of pensive ecstasy, not unlike the half stupor produced by a narcotic. Colthurst hailed this singular condition when it came on him, yielded himself up to it unreservedly. The ecstasy seemed to culminate, reaching a degree of almost painful intensity during the five or ten minutes he spent daily standing beside Mary Crookenden, or sitting at her easel, although he only spoke to her of technical and impersonal matters, and that, as he tried never to forget, in the presence of a company of shrewd-eyed onlookers.

Colthurst was really struggling very gallantly to keep

faith with the nobler side of his nature. But he felt somewhat like a rope-dancer, always balancing himself, not daring to move freely or look below, lest he should turn giddy, lose his footing and fall headlong. His standard of conduct was set at an almost extravagantly high level. The distance to the ground was very great. To fall headlong would be proportionately dangerous. He perceived that, and the idea of such a fall became not only increasingly alarming, but increasingly disgusting to him. For the ambition of conducting this delicate business to the end with success; of behaving with an ideal sort of chivalry; of being able, when it was all done and over, to look back on this period of his life without hint of self-accusation or self-reproach; of being able to say that in respect of this one woman, at least, his bearing had been Quixotic in the refinement of its honour—the ambition to accomplish this, partly out of reverence for Miss Crookenden herself, partly as an act of expiation, had taken very strong hold of Colthurst's imagination. He almost prayed, fatalist though he was, that his effort to preserve a perfectly neutral attitude towards this beautiful woman, might be taken as payment of former sins against womanhood, might be accepted in liquidation of old bad debts.

He tried to treat her precisely as he treated his other lady pupils. From the first he had ostensibly taken her presence entirely for granted; had offered her no greeting,

had expressed no surprise, no pleasure. With her he was as dogmatic and exacting as with the rest. More so, perhaps; for several times Mary had reason—as she thought—to resent his strictures and accuse his criticism of a degree of quite uncalled-for brutality; but there was no time for protest, for remonstrance. In his quick, deft, cat-like way Colthurst came, pulled her poor work, as she thought rather cruelly, to pieces, and went again. Mary was very much in earnest, hot with the desire to learn, absorbed in her employment; yet, at moments she could not avoid being slightly piqued at Colthurst's—apparently—supreme indifference to her existence. She shut herself up within a stately coldness of manner. And Colthurst thanked her silently yet very devoutly for so doing. It made his position somewhat less trying. For dogmatism and apparent indifference notwithstanding he was all the while acutely conscious of her every movement, of her every gesture, of every inflection of her voice, every detail of her dress—sober now, shorn of all superfluous ornament. He was conscious, too, of each delicate change in the waxen whiteness of her complexion, of the shade of red-brown which tinged her eyelids as towards evening she grew tired from work in the hot dry atmosphere of the studios. All this Colthurst knew by instinct, for he avoided looking at her as much as he could. Any responsive kindling or softening of those beautiful eyes might prove the straw too much,

and make him lose his balance. Ah! such rope-dancing as this, going on day after day, week after week, must needs be too heavy a strain on any man's nerves, unless he is made of ice and iron, rather than ordinary flesh and blood. Short of a moral miracle, loss of balance and consequent fall would seem inevitable.

Perhaps the moral miracle might have been worked, and Colthurst thereby enabled to hold out to the appointed end of his risky performance—it is pleasant, any way, to imagine it would have been so—had not Jenny Parris, with her incurable habit of riding to lose rather than win in the race of life, managed to give the tight-rope a shake which of necessity precipitated a catastrophe.

It happened thus. Jenny was ill. The winter weather increased that nasty dragging cough of hers. She slept badly, sickened at the sight of food, fell into a state of depression that stirred much kindliness and much indignation in the ample bosom of Mrs. Prust. About the middle of January the state of affairs appeared so very serious to that excellent woman, that she went the length of packing her gouty and most unwilling master-mariner into a square cab, and sending him off to Kensington to look up Colthurst. Captain Prust's moral courage was not proportionate to his irascibility, and this mission of remonstrance and rebuke was not in the very least to his taste. To his unspeakable relief Colthurst was out. He contented himself by leaving a long rambling message,

therefore, calculated to obscure rather than set forth the truth.

'But he'll know all about it soon enough,' he said to himself on the return journey, spitting reflectively from the window of the square cab in the intervals of a consolatory pipe. 'Lord love you, S'lome's crowding on sail. If she catches him she'll let him have it hot.'

In response to the enigmatic message Colthurst called at Delamere Crescent; and, regardless of top dressings of coals of fire prepared by Mrs. Prust, soon called again. I was very painful to him to do so. That the ugly side of his life should clutch and hold him ju now seemed rather cruel. But there is a fertilising pow in all moral effort. Colthurst, trying honestly to do nobly in one direction, began to do at least not ignobly in others. He was really very kind to Jenny at this period; kind in the little, material, unromantic ways which, for some reason, are so curiously comforting to a woman's heart. He brought her dainties, and coaxed her to eat, sitting meanwhile—his broad shoulders and square head silhouetted against the dingy window overlooking a long perspective of barren back yards—on the corner of the chest-of-drawers that occupied all the space between her untidy bed and the opposite wall of the narrow room. I do not wish to sentimentalize over James Colthurst. He was, to put it colloquially, plenty big enough to take care of himself. Yet somehow it strikes me as not a little pathetic, illustra-

tive of the relentless dragging apart of the very foundations that may be taking place in careers apparently covered with brilliant success, to watch him go thus from reigning tyrant-like over all those clever young people at the Connop School, from inhaling the incense of good Mr. Barwell's reverent admiration, from the promulgation of his gospel of art, from his silent adoration of so delicate and exquisite a product of high civilization as Mary Crookenden,—to sit on the corner of a chest-of-drawers in a cheerless, littered, stuffy lodging-house bedchamber, and help, with champagne and oysters, and Brand's essence, and grapes and what not, to keep life in the woman whose final and permanent exit from life would have been the solution of so many problems, the easing of so many distresses for him. If we set forth the man's bad moments, at least let us set forth his good ones as well; remembering the divinely comfortable saying that there is greater joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over the ninety-and-nine just persons who have no cause for repentance.

And Colthurst did more than spend his substance in Heidsieck and oysters; though not being very flush of money just now, that was tax enough in itself. His work at the Connop School had compelled him to postpone the finishing of the portrait mentioned by Adolphus Carr, and of another which he had been painting. It is true the Council had not accepted his proposal of giving his

services, but the salary they could offer him as *locum tenens* was but a small one. Colthurst began to find the disagreeable old question of ways and means staring him in the face again by the beginning of February. He took radical measures to meet it. He underlet the grand studio in Kensington to Horatio Deland, the thought-reader, who happily fancied it as presenting an attractive environment for *séances* and other entertainments of a pseudo-scientific, pseudo-necromantic description, in which that undulating spinster, Miss Dampier, Lady Theodosia Pringle, and other children of whom one charitably trusts Wisdom may one day be justified—that day I admit appears a long way off yet—enthusiastically took part. He installed himself meanwhile in a couple of rooms in a house just opposite the College entrance in Wentworth Street; and removed his two Academy pictures to a small unused studio at the top of the school buildings, in which he contrived to do a fair amount of painting at odd hours. By these means he reduced current expenses sufficiently to be able to send Jenny away to a sheltered place on the south coast for three weeks, where little Dot built sand castles, decorated with whelk-shells and semi-defunct star-fish and other marine curiosities of high value, and danced around them in the frail spring sunshine, as gaily defiant of the incoming tide as though no ugly bar-sinister defaced her little private escutcheon and rendered her a wholly inconvenient and uncalled-for addition to the millions of the human

race. Jenny came back very much the better for sea-breezes. She ate. She slept. The sense of returning health was almost intoxicating to her. Her spirits went up with a rush. From pure lightness of heart she was tempted to give the tight-rope that fatal shake.

It fell out thus. Colthurst had, more than once, complained to his colleague of the costume models who sat for the female students in the class-room upstairs three times a week.

'What is the possible use,' he said, 'of having one sleek Italian girl after another, with no more meaning behind her great, brown heifer's eyes than one of the ruminants she, in her peaceable moments, so much resembles? If we could have the girls as they look at home, in Fetter Lane say, when the devil gets into them, and white teeth show, and a knife glitters out in the yellow gas-light, there might be some object in drawing them. As it is, they are only a degree less unprofitable, less likely to fill our students' heads with false notions of beauty, than that pantheon of stucco pagan deities in the antique. Can't you get us a few Englishwomen whose beauty lies in something more intelligible and intelligent? Women who have lost their baby-face and have acquired the aspect of ordinary, reasonable human beings, with a past behind and salvation or damnation ahead of them?'

Poor Mr. Barwell groaned a little inwardly at this cheapening of the accredited Italian type and back-

handed slap at the antique. But Colthurst's word was law. So the amiable man hastened to put himself in communication with Miss Annie Sutton, an English model of unassailable respectability and considerable popularity, requesting her to pass the word to other members of the professional sisterhood.

'I am happy to say I believe we have found just the person we require,' the under-master announced, mildly radiant, meeting Colthurst in the office a few days later. 'Not too young, the baby-face you so object to conspicuous by its absence—a fine figure for drapery. She tells me she had the honour of standing to you several times a few years ago.'

For various reasons Colthurst was not ardently desirous of renewing the acquaintance of a few years ago. Just now he was engaged in turning down his trousers, the morning was warm and showery and the pavements slushy; he straightened himself up rather sharply.

'W-what's her name?' he asked.

'Harris,' Mr. Barwell replied, a trifle surprised at the other's abruptness. 'She gave it as Jane Harris.'

Colthurst completed the operation of turning down his trousers. A most unpleasant suspicion occurred to him; but he thrust it aside as preposterous and consequently abominably unjust.

'I never heard of the woman in my life,' he declared with a certain violence of denial.

'Very likely not,' Mr. Barwell hastened to say. 'But even models have the weakness, common to human nature, of embroidering truth slightly in furtherance of their own interests. A good many models whom you have never heard of in your life, Mr. Colthurst, I fancy, are tempted to use your name as a passport at present—that is one of the taxes levied on celebrity. But the worst of having English models is that they will chatter. They bring the gossip of half the studios in London here, and dribble it out to our students during the rests, and very doubtfully improving gossip a great deal of it is, too.'

Colthurst moved towards the office door. His expression was anything but benign.

'This woman must be told plainly we shall be obliged to her to hold her tongue then,' he said, rather brutally.

The under-master shuffled after him, his countenance irradiated by an indulgent smile. The observation of Colthurst's different phases afforded him endless food for meditation. 'Amazingly vigorous,' he said to himself, 'never two days alike.' Then he added aloud :—

'Yes, she shall be told, Mr. Colthurst. But a prohibition may not act as an effectual gag, I fear. In dealing with the fair sex silence is not always altogether easy to enforce, you know.'

For, in truth, Mr. Barwell hankered after his heifer-eyed Italians. Human beings with a past behind and salvation or damnation ahead of them appeared to him somewhat

exhausting. He was getting up in years; and when the magnetism of Colthurst's genius was lifted off him, he had no particular longing to knock his amiable bird-like head against any of the innumerable insoluble problems of human existence.

Colthurst ran quickly down stairs into the theatre. The young men were working there alone; and this usually was the occasion for his affording them much gratuitous instruction in the philosophy of art. But this morning he was harassed by that same suspicion. He could not divest his mind of it. The suspicion was preposterous he admitted. Yet Colthurst's imagination continued to play with it, to return to it to develop it, to see all that it might possibly mean and bring along with it, while repeating that it was preposterous and wholly inadmissible. And he perceived, moreover, that his hands were tied in respect of it; and that to cross-question Mr. Barwell was to court the exposure of that he so earnestly desired to keep hid. Fifty times he told himself the suspicion was an insanity. Fifty times he asked himself what on earth he should do if it proved correct? The name too, sickened him. Jane Harris—if it was an *alias*, what depths of pitiful absurdity, poverty of invention there had been in the selection of it.

It is needless to state that these meditations did not tend to make Colthurst pleasant company. When he left the theatre more than one young gentleman permitted

himself to remark that 'The Boss was in the beastliest of beastly tempers to-day;' that he looked 'as black as pitch;' and that his criticisms were positively malignant in their severity. The students upstairs, in the antique, fared little better. A dreadful legend exists, but I refuse to vouch for the truth of it, that one soft-hearted damsel striving zealously to 'shade in the contours of time-honoured Discobolus,' was actually heard by her near neighbours to emit sounds suggestive of stifled weeping when he quitted her easel. This I trust was an exaggeration; yet undoubtedly Colthurst induced considerable sensations of alarm in more than one of his pupils. A certain blackness and malignancy really did seem to emanate from him which was extremely disconcerting to weak nerves. It was hardly surprising. Pushed, pestered, haunted by that preposterous suspicion, his whole being was in revolt.

Mary Crookenden had arrived rather late. She had hardly got her tools into order when Colthurst entered the school. He perceived this, as he usually did perceive, at first glance how this particular young lady was employed, and decided, though her place was nearly in the centre of the room, to leave his lesson to her till among the last. She was drawing Wrestlers; but the outline of the two figures, crushed together in their fixed, unending struggle, was barely complete as yet. Mary used charcoal well, delicately and freely. Her lines had

meaning and value. Her drawing possessed that indefinable something which makes all the difference. She saw that presented to her freshly, unconventionally, as for the first time. She had a native gift of style.

Colthurst—having completed his tour of the school—now standing just behind her looking at her sketch of the two straining figures, was aware of this; and, notwithstanding his ill humour and disquieting suspicions it gave him pleasure. There was grip and vivacity in the sketch. Miss Crookenden, sensible of his presence, slipped off her high wooden chair, and stood on one side. Her movements were deliberate, to the point of indolence. Her face was vacant of expression. Her eyelids, with that brownish tinge upon them, drooped a little over her eyes. She wore a very plain grey gown, and a large white linen apron with a bib to it. She rested the butt-end of her maulstick on the ground and waited, attentive, silent, cold.

Colthurst leaned both hands on the back of her vacant chair, glanced from the drawing-board to the group of statuary and back again.

'This is a good sketch,' he said presently. 'It is accurate, and it is more than that. To take an original and imaginative view of these very familiar p-plaster idols is by no means easy; but in the present case you strike me as having come very near performing that remarkable feat.'

He leaned back, holding the chair at arm's length, tipping the front legs of it off the ground. Looked care-

fully at the drawing again, running his eyes rapidly, steadily over the bowed backs and strained, bent limbs. Then he looked full at Miss Crookenden. Hunted as he was and badgered by that preposterous suspicion, he grew reckless of danger. Neither the fever fit nor the languidly ecstatic fit of love was on him, but only a sombre sense of rebellion. If his suspicion was correct, before the day was out he would be put to the torture. In the interval he would stint himself of no fair sight that might chance to come in view.

'Yes, this is good,' he repeated. 'I am proud of you, I congratulate you heartily, Miss Crookenden, on your work.'

The compliment was startling in its unexpectedness. Mary did not move; but she was very much gratified. She could not help showing her gratification. She raised her head a little, raised her eyelids.

'Thanks,' she said. 'I am very glad you think well of it.'

And Colthurst found himself staring into the luminous depths of her eyes.

After the long course of abstinence to which he had condemned the emotional side of his nature so rigorously, his sensation for the instant was little short of rapture. He forgot everything in the delight of Miss Crookenden's beauty and that gracious expression of pleasure that had come into her charming face.

But the rapture was of brief duration. For the suspicion, which for the instant he had beaten off as a wounded creature beats off the vultures drawing near to tear before their time, hopped evilly back again, even as the vultures hop, settled, stretched out its ugly naked neck and vicious beak. Colthurst's imagination had gone to work again, and it flashed upon him the suggestion of a combination outrageous, hateful, in its incongruity. At all events, that must not be realized, come what might. Not on his own account—Colthurst cared very little about saving his own skin, just then—but because it offered an insult to Miss Crookenden which his mind refused to contemplate. The thought of it trenched on madness.

At the first hop of the returning vulture he had turned once more to Miss Crookenden's drawing-board. And the young lady was glad of this. For though Colthurst's indifference had piqued her sometimes, she assured herself it was infinitely preferable to any recurrence of the eccentric bearing to which he had treated her on the occasion of their first meeting. Mary tried to forget that first meeting. It had been most disagreeable. Since then, Colthurst had done a great deal for her. She was very grateful to him. She was interested in him. More interested, possibly, than she quite admitted. His approval of her drawing had given her acute satisfaction. But she hoped to goodness he was not going to manifest any eccentricities again.

All this takes long to put into words. It occupied a very short time in fact. Mary had barely remarked Colthurst's odd way of regarding her, felt relieved when it ceased, before he spoke.

'W-what shall you be doing this afternoon?' he asked.

'Mr. Barwell told me to begin painting from the costume model. You remember, no doubt, we have a fresh one to-day.'

Colthurst leaned forward and neatly swept a few loose crumbs of charcoal off the surface of the gray paper.

'I d-do not see that you are likely to gain any p-particular benefit by painting the costume model,' he said, speaking very rapidly in that hissing, hesitating way of his. 'Costume m-models are rather cheap after all. If you want to work from them you can do so at any time —have them in your own studio at home—you know.'—Colthurst paused.—'I—I should much prefer your giving more time to anatomy. You may not have opportunities of studying it later—when you leave here, I mean. The theatre will be vacant this afternoon; take this sketch down there, and with the help of the skeleton, and the anatomical figure, and the plates in Fau, try to put the bones into this upper figure and make an *écorché* of the lower one. Barwell shall bring you the Vesalius out of the library, if you like. It would be c-capital practice for you. It would test your knowledge. It would teach you a lot.'

He flicked off another crumb of charcoal. His heart beat in his ears. It seemed an age waiting, till Miss Crookenden's grave voice answered—'Very well. If you wish it. But it is rather a severe task.'

Colthurst looked up.

'I d-do wish it,' he stammered. 'I wish it very much.'

Mary could not help smiling, and that sweetly. She felt a strange pity, all at once, for this strong, dogmatic, domineering man. The unprofessional side of things intruded itself, somehow, for the first time in their daily intercourse. She could not resist making him a playful little speech.

'You are master. Clearly it is for you to command, and for me to obey.'

Colthurst's eyes were fixed on the drawing-board. The vulture had hopped a little way off again; but only a little way. It sat watching.

'Thanks,' he said, quite gently. 'In this case I have no doubt it will be best for you to obey.'

Chapter VI.

As Colthurst came into the class-room adjoining his studio, the costume model—had any of the ladies present observed the fact, which, being engaged with their own appearance and performances in view of the entrance of

the master, they happily did not—narrowed her eyes in uncontrollable inclination towards laughter. The movement was irresistible, instantaneous. She mastered it, and again was absolutely still, save for the steady rise and fall of her bosom in breathing.

Jenny had thrown herself into one of the semi-tragic, Sibylline attitudes which suited her height and large frame so well. She wore a—so-called—Greek robe of faded indigo-coloured woollen; the material of it thin and pliant enough to indicate the outline of her finely-moulded limbs. It was fastened on either shoulder, leaving the whole of the arms bare, and was girdled cross-wise on the chest and under the bosom with narrow bands of tarnished gold embroidery. Her back was towards Colthurst as he entered. She sat side-ways on her chair, one arm lying along the top bar of it, the other hanging straight down at her side. Her left knee was dropped as in half kneeling, and the soft blue draperies caught aside disclosed her bare foot. Jenny, as we know, was well aware of the beauty of her feet, and on the subject of displaying them she and Mr. Barwell had had a smart little skirmish when he had come some hour and a half earlier to pose her. She had already whipped off her over-skirt and claret-coloured ulster, and was sitting on one end of the platform calmly divesting herself of her boots and stockings.

'I think we needn't trouble you to do that, Miss Harris,' he had observed, mildly.

'Excuse me,' Jenny had answered very promptly, 'but I don't agree. Why, the robe's nowhere with a pair of muddy boots under it. I am a pretty seasoned hand at this business, and I tell you I'd rather not stand at all than do the thing shabbily.' She threw back her head with a laugh. 'And it'll be a good lesson, in more ways than one, for your students to see a shapely foot for once. I'll warrant most of their own are crooked and cramped enough, what with pointed toes and high heels, and all the rest of it.'

Poor Mr. Barwell gave in. In truth, this model struck him as a rather embarrassing lady. He sighed for his ruminant Italians again. And it had required all his moral courage and sense of duty to enable him to speak to her about the high desirability of maintaining silence during the rests.

'Oh! those are the orders, are they?' she said, not without darkening of anger in her handsome face. 'I understand. You can make yourself easy. I'm not going to talk.'—Mentally she called the amiable undermaster a 'frightful old granny,' and despised him from the bottom of her heart.

But once in position Jenny became utterly motionless—her eyes wide open looking out as to an infinite distance from under the cloud of hair massed low on her forehead. Probably she inherited this power of entire immobility from generations of sea-going ancestors—from men who

had sat, hour after hour, in dreamy silence on the deck of some white-sailed vessel, staring across the vast furrowed plains of blue-green water; or who, when ashore, had lounged on the wall guarding the rocky road up from Beera Quay, in the crannies of which tiny ferns cluster and penny-pies root their round red-stemmed succulent leaves and spires of greenish flower, gazing away and away, in idle quiescent contentment, out to sea.

It speaks well for Colthurst's courage that finding his preposterous suspicions realized, seeing Jenny posing there in the indigo-coloured robe he knew so well, he managed to repress all outward signs of excitement. He had divined rightly, then. At first it was not fear of a scene and of consequent exposure which made Colthurst sicken inwardly and curse himself and this unruly being bound to him by an unacknowledgable tie. Rather was it the revelation of the grossness of her levity in having conceived the idea of coming here; and the hatefulness of her actual presence, desecrating this place, in which some of the highest impulses and purest emotions of his life had been granted him. This was the reward he was to have, then, for the sacrifices he had so lately been making for her. This was the return for all his efforts to pay off old bad debts. To Jenny, lying ill in that untidy bed-chamber in Mrs. Prust's lodging-house, he could be kind, tender, if needs be. But for Jenny obtruding herself here, for Jenny playing this horrible comedy, for Jenny

under the same roof as Mary Crookenden, Colthurst feared he had no mercy.

And then, as he began to pass from easel to easel, Jenny's face and form became to him as one of those terrible, ever-changing, yet ever stable forms and faces seen in delirium. It was everywhere. Here by the door, an outline of brow, and cheek, and chin, the fine curve of the nape of her neck and shoulder. Next, three or four samples of her profile; the three-quarters face, then the full face, worn yet handsome—the sad, still, grey eyes seeming to ask of the future, and of him, too—that was the intolerable burden of it—the righting of some great wrong once done her. Then the three-quarters face again, with the turning of the horse-shoe of easels. The profile; and so back once more to the somewhat too accentuated outline of brow, and cheek and chin; and on this side the raised arm and drooping hand, lying along the top of the chair-back. — Everywhere, wherever he looked, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny. A world of Jennies. Jenny angelic and Jenny demonic. Jenny feebly inadequate, elegant, barber-block-like, innocuous, full of shrinking propriety. Jenny exaggerated, fierce, Cassandra-like, portentous, and fateful. Jenny frankly absurd and ridiculous; caricatures of her emphasizing every unhappy trait, every doubtfully graceful line of her. Each student, of all the twenty there, absorbed in the thought of Jenny. All the twenty right hands, there, busy reproducing an image of Jenny.

All the forty eyes, there, dwelling, lingering, in close and careful scrutiny upon Jenny. And in the midst of them, uplifted, enthroned, silent, motionless, sphinx-like, Jenny herself, the living, breathing woman,—listening, he felt, to his lightest footfall, hearing his every word, counting his heart-beats, knowing, though in her present posture she could not see him, that the dull red flush had come up over his sallow skin, that his breath was short, that it was just all he could do to steady his arm sufficiently to handle a brush or hold a stick of charcoal.

And yet, hideous as it was, Colthurst saw he must go through with it. That, in bare self-defence, he must continue to stand unconcernedly beside each one of these twenty easels in turn; and treat each one of the twenty young ladies seated at them—diligent, respectful, in some cases clever and well-bred women—to a series of criticisms, conceived in a calm and judicial spirit, upon their presentment of lips he had kissed, of eyes that had wept over him, of hands that had tended him with untiring ministry in sickness. If he gave way, if he flinched, if ever so slight a lapse occurred in the authoritative indifference of his official manner, if he forgot for ever so short a space that he was here as Director of the Connop Trust School, instructing a class of lady students in drawing and painting—as was their custom three days a week —from a professional costume model, hired to stand for the sum of one shilling and sixpence per hour, he was aware he

should no longer be able to count on Jenny. Her silence, her discretion might be swept away in some wild outrush of personal feeling. She might blast his name, his position, his prospects by an unpermissible revelation of the relation which existed between them.

Colthurst felt like a man shut in a cage with a half-tamed lion. A false step, a slip, an instant of nervousness, and the beast might be at his throat. The tension was tremendous. Once he thought all was lost.

He had worked his way half round, was nearly opposite to Jenny, when one of the students, just beyond, seated in the left-hand corner of the room, after consulting her watch, hung on the apex of her easel, called—'Time.'

Jenny rose. Stretched herself—she was a trifle cramped—with a superb disregard of observation, throwing her body back from the waist, while she clenched her hands and held them first straight out, then above her head. She laughed a little as she did so, quite good-humouredly, looking across at Colthurst—just then declaiming to a plain, industrious young lady on the muddy opacity of her flesh tints—with a very devil of mischief lurking in her eyes.

And in justice to Jenny, it must be asserted that she had a most limited conception of the suffering she was inflicting on her former lover. She was feeling better, stronger after that dreary spell of illness. She longed for a little change, a dash of excitement, amid the dull

sameness of her life. Poor, silly soul, she loved posing, loved striking an attitude, commanding admiration, loved having a roomful of people staring at her by the hour together. Loved to hear her 'points' discussed, to hear comments on her fine figure. Loved to sport that same indigo-coloured robe, with its strips of tarnished embroidery. Loved to occupy a position of importance—even at the price of eighteenpence an hour. As she had said herself, she was only nine-and-twenty after all. Her tastes were not refined, I admit, but that did not prevent her desiring to gratify them ardently. Jim had been good, very good, to her lately. Her hopes had risen. She could understand—he had made her do that pretty plainly—that he could not have her at his studio. But this public art-school was quite another matter—so it seemed, at least to poor, short-sighted Jenny. She wanted so badly to know what it was all like; wanted to see Jim, in whose company she had come so near starving, set up as a great man, filling a post not disdained by a member of the Royal Academy itself. Jenny—it is piteous to think of all it implies as one writes it—had offered herself as model at the Connop School in pure lightness of heart. She longed for a frolic. She thought it would be a rare bit of fun to play this practical joke on James Colthurst.

As luck would have it, too, the day was peculiarly windless and mild. Such moist, close, spring weather suited Jenny well. Her cough then gave her little trouble;

and the damp air made her skin smooth and fair. She and Dot and Mrs. Prust had made quite merry in the grim sitting-room in Delamere Crescent, fastening up the blue robe under her dress-skirt, and getting the claret-coloured ulster to sit with some little air of fashion and smartness over the miscellaneous garments worn beneath it. The pink almonds were in flower in one of the squares through which she passed. Always generous and improvident, she had bestowed quite a large sum in coppers on beggars and crossing-sweepers, and had gone on her way delighted by their vociferous blessings. She had met women selling bunches of yellow Lent lilies. Lent lilies grow in profusion on the banks of the glebe fields just around Beera Church. She remembered racing down in breathless haste, many a time, from afternoon school to gather them, with a company of bright-eyed, carmine-cheeked, little maidens like herself. The soft moisture of the spring day reminded her of the dear West country, too. Poor Jenny—one's heart bleeds for her!—she was happy, gentle, tender-hearted, full of shy hopes and pretty memories as she set out on her disastrous fool's errand to the Connop School at noon.

Tenderness had given place to another order of emotion now, yet Jenny was still gay. She was a good deal impressed, it is true, by the dignity which surrounded James Colthurst, by the deference with which she observed he was spoken of and treated. But she had not been unaware

of the slight movement of self-consciousness, a trifle of that amiable desire which all right-minded young women exhibit to appear to the best advantage on finding themselves in the presence of a member of the opposite sex, among the assembled students when the master came into the room. And this, although it aroused her jealousy slightly, was highly diverting to her. She had not any wish or intention of compromising Colthurst, far from that. But she was amused, on the alert, observant; and she laughed as she looked at Jim by way of gathering him into the joke—just to let him know it.

Colthurst retained his composure.

'Your shadows are not nearly warm enough,' he was saying. 'They are too grey. Your flesh tones will be decidedly harsh and false unless you modify them.'

The young lady assented ruefully, humbly.

'Just hold up your canvas, please,' he went on doggedly. 'Match the basis of colour as you have it against the model's face and neck. Do you see, now? I am sorry to tell you this is lamentably weak.'

Colthurst drew himself up, and raised his voice, addressing the whole class:—

'I wish you to understand, once and for all, ladies, that weakness, either in conception or execution, is in my opinion the un—p-pardonable sin. It may be taken as an axiom in all d-departments of arts, that where there is strength there is hope. Weakness, feebleness, are hope-

less. I remark an inclination among you, if you will p-pardon my speaking frankly, to be enamoured of the pretty-pretty, of that feebleness which it is the fashion to disguise under the p-plea of refinement.'

Jenny's laugh had exasperated Colthurst beyond endurance. She stood lazily resting her hands on the top-rail of her chair. A magnificent creature, notwithstanding past hard-living, and recent illness, in her flowing garments, with that sharp-edged mocking smile upon her full lips. Colthurst gave her a straight glance from under his heavy brows. The line across his forehead was cut deep, and his restless, fanatical eyes had a wicked expression in them.

'It is because I want to correct this inclination in you, ladies,' he went on, 'that I have requested Mr. Barwell to engage no more Italian models for you at p-present. I am anxious you should have more solid and less superficially pleasing material to study from. I b-beg you to throw aside all thoughts of the pretty-pretty, all longings after refinement. Those longings will not be gratified. I b-beg you to understand that this model is not selected because she offers you any approach to an ideal type of beauty. We p-propose dropping beauty for a time, and giving you the wholesome tonic of average fact. I b-beg you, therefore, to draw and paint, in as far as you are able, precisely what you see. There are imperfections in your subject. State them. I desire no softening d-down, no finicking

attempts to present a grace or charm which is absent in the original; no squeamish ignoring of what may appear to you common or coarse.'

Colthurst paused. The sound of his own words heightened his excitement, his sense of the wrong done, the insult offered him. He had begun striking that dangerous wild beast—to pick up our old illustration again—in self-defence. But his blood was up. Too soon he struck, not in self-defence, but for the mere brutal pleasure of striking.

Jenny listened in growing horror of amazement. Gradually the enormity of her own folly dawned upon her. Colthurst's voice and manner cowed her, and she slunk back to her seat again; and bent her head low as she arranged her voluminous blue draperies.

'I d-demand that your work be perfectly honest and straightforward,' he continued, 'right down on the lines of life as you know it. Personally I should prefer your drawing from models wearing their ordinary everyd-day clothes—putting all question of costume, another name for silly, showy, theatrical dressing-up—aside. When the æsthetic sense of the British public is so highly developed that it has become customary for women to trail about the dirty streets there outside in Greek robes, it will be quite time enough, to my thinking, for you to study the folds of them. Is the rest up?' he asked, turning abruptly upon the possessor of the watch in the right-hand corner of the room.

She answered very hurriedly in the affirmative, having a sense that the air, for cause unknown, was most disagreeably overcharged with electricity; and 'wishing really,' as she subsequently remarked, in the ladies' cloak room, 'that if Mr. Colthurst had things like that to say—of course he was quite right in theory—but if he wanted to say those sort of things he wouldn't say them before the model, because really it made one feel so dreadfully hot and uncomfortable, you know.'

Jenny, meanwhile, raised her bowed head, tried to settle herself back into position. But her sight was all blurred. She could not make out the chalk marks for her feet. Her heart beat so fast, that it shook her whole frame. She could hardly keep her arms or body still.

Colthurst watched her steadily for a minute, in silence. Then he threaded his way between the intervening easels, and went up close to the platform.

'You have shifted your position,' he said, still speaking in the same unnaturally loud, hard voice. 'I must trouble you to bring your left arm more this way. Yes—so—that's better. And the mark for your foot is at least two inches further back. There—that'll do.'

As she stooped down to rearrange the edge of the drapery about her foot, Jenny gave Colthurst one look of desperate, despairing entreaty. He was so close to her she could have touched him.

'Jim!' she said, with a gasp under her breath.

As her lips moved Colthurst started back, bringing his elbow into collision with the tray of the nearest easel—sending plummet, crayons, stumps, and charcoal rattling on to the ground.

There was a depth of pettiness and miserable meanness in his action which was abhorrent to him. It was disgusting, but it saved the situation. With profuse apologies for his awkwardness he bent down and recovered the scattered drawing materials; then moved quickly back to his former place, and went on with his lesson once more. Alas! poor, short-sighted, foolish, impossible Jenny, is this the wretched end of your frolic? or is there worse—you begin to fear it—behind?

The lion dared not spring now. He had very effectually beaten the creature into submissive humility. There would be no scandal. He would see Jenny to-night or some time to-morrow in Delamere Crescent. She should break her engagement. She should put in no second appearance, that was very certain. Colthurst had no fear but that he could secure himself against any repetition of this persecution. But still it seemed to him that she had done him an unpardonable injury. She had rendered his high efforts abortive. Coarsely, wantonly she had rubbed the bloom off his work and off his love. Here, in this place, where the ugly past had seemed to be falling from him, releasing him from so much that he loathed as low and disgraceful,

here where he had made a really gallant effort to work out his salvation, here Jenny had come and claimed him; strongly, if silently, had laid her hands upon him; had shamed and outraged him—in his own eyes, in any case. Yes, let us try to hold the balance even. The suffering, the injury, were by no means all on the woman's side.

How Colthurst got through the remainder of the lesson he hardly knew. For still around him everywhere was the pictured horror of Jenny's face and figure. The face that had made his fortune. The face he had painted in his now famous 'Road to Ruin'—the picture which, as he knew was travelling over the length and breadth of England, drawing a crowd of interested spectators to the library or fine arts gallery of a hundred watering places and provincial towns.—And there in the midst still, her laughter dead, her spirit broken, beaten into submission by the lash of his cruel tongue, motionless, speechless, as a being under the blighting curse of some weird spell, Jenny herself—Jenny, poor soul, who, thanks to him, had wandered so many weary steps along that same road to ruin now.

At last it was over. The door was shut between them; and Colthurst stood on the flagged landing outside, alone.

Chapter VII.

The relief of being outside there alone was great. Now that the strain was over Colthurst felt utterly worn out. The lower sash of the high, narrow landing-window had been thrown up. He leaned his elbows on the window-sill. The moist spring air was welcome to him.

The sun had come out, and glistened on the wet slated roofs of the college buildings opposite. Below, in the centre of the quadrangle, some sparrows played about the shallow stone basin, which, with its attenuated squirt of water, relieved the uninteresting uniformity of the surrounding asphalt pavement. Colthurst noted these things, noted them with the vacant sort of observation which goes no further than eye and ear, awakening no responsive movement of the intelligence. Noted the heavy masses of steaming purplish vapour, sun-gilded here and there, trailing away above the city to eastward. Noted the hoarse roar of the traffic, setting to and from the great railway terminus whose rounded, glazed roofs to the left gave oft a wide dazzle of misty brightness. Noted, too, that the sharp impudent chirping of the sparrows detached itself from that continuous roar like points of light from a sombre background.

Colthurst was very miserable as he leaned on the window-sill and gazed down into the sloppy quadrangle.

The deluge had come. And it appeared to be an universal one. Usually he was self-sufficing enough, but now his self-confidence deserted him. He was swept under by a tide of all-embracing scepticism. Turn where he would there seemed no hope, no comfort left. For, as is the case with so many of us when the world goes ill with us, Colthurst was guilty of the egotism of shifting the blame from his own shoulders on to those of the general constitution of things; of making the universal economy, in short, responsible for the consequences of his own none too virtuous actions. It was excusable perhaps, for he was very tired. Much of his depression was physical, no doubt, the result of acute nervous exhaustion. Yet, as is the way of persons troubled by excitable brains, while his body actually ached from weariness, his mind worked with feverish exaggerated activity, presenting to him a procession of disjointed images in which a very sufficient spirit of pessimism found vent.

'If one could only stop the machinery for an hour or two,' he said to himself, 'and get a rest! Expunge thought and feeling, put out one's eyes, shut one's ears, sit dumb, blind, solitary in the void. If there is a void—but that's just the intolerable wear and tear of it, there is no void, no space of silence and quiet. Everywhere energy, force, drive. Everywhere a crowd, a hideous jostling crowd of things struggling to be born; struggling to make themselves heard and felt; struggling to push something

else aside so as to make their word, their want, their meaning known. And all to no purpose. Their word is emptiness, their want fruitless, their meaning *nil.* For the circle is never broken; nothing, nobody, can even break out of it and be free. The great mill-stones turn and turn on themselves eternally, grinding down each generation—man, beast, all living beings alike—into food for the coming generations, which in due time will be ground down too. If one could only remember that, be passive, be careless, refuse to expect, refuse to fight. But then comes in the infernal malice of the whole conception. Good care has been taken to make us so that we must expect, must fight. For the sake of keeping the gigantic farce in full play we are tricked with an innate conviction of our own power, freedom, personality, tricked by the flattering conceit that it is not only possible but incumbent upon us to act, and create, and believe, and find out.'

Colthurst rested his head in both hands.

'That the race may continue, and so the great mills never lack grist, that the great lie may thrive, burgeon out, grow fatter and fuller, as the ages go forward, it is to further this end and this only, that our mothers conceive us, bring us forth with strong crying and tears, suckle us with an infinitude of brooding tenderness; that we ourselves push up, love, suffer, aspire, live our lives without stint. Maimed and degraded, triumphant and sainted, genius, idiot, or good, ordinary, thick-witted philistine

alike,' he said, 'there's no escape for any one of us. We're all shot into the hopper and ground down at last.'

He let his hands sink on the stone window-ledge, while with a vacant attention he watched the movements of the impudently chirping sparrows playing about the stone basin. And as he did so the thought occurred to him, in an idly speculative way, of how simple it would be to lean out of the window a little too far. The drop was close upon fifty feet, he judged, to the ground.

'It seems curiously easy to forestall fate,' he said, 'and shoot oneself into the hopper. I wonder people don't do it oftener. One can't help fancying one might find quiet so.'

To his imagination the idea of falling from some great height had always been strangely fascinating. He remembered how, when he had that brain fever as a boy, night after night he had felt himself compelled by some resistless power—he could give it neither shape nor name—to crawl out to the extreme edge of Saturn's luminous ring, and look over into illimitable space. And how, at least one night, one frightful—or was it blissful?—night, the power had pressed him harder than ever before. Had forced him out and out, had come close and grappled with him, had seized and flung him over headlong into the bottomless gulf of space, of darkness, and of utter silence, save for the hiss of his own body rushing downward through the blank air.

He had not thought of the dream for years. Not since not since the night of Jenny Parris' birthday party at Red Rock Mouth, when he had watched the drifting herring-boats from the rocky road leading up from Beera Quay. He recalled the whole scene as though it had been of yesterday. The black headland, the glistening pallor hanging in the west, the babble of the stream down the gulley mingling with the growling trample of the ground swell on the beach below; his groping for stones in the roadway, wherewith to prove the world was round; and the light in Jenny's bedroom window.

Jenny Parris.—Colthurst was filled to overflowing with bitterness. For he might rail at the universal economy and general constitution of things as loudly as he pleased; try at once to conceal the indignity of his present position, and assuage his disgust of it by fine phrases of pessimist philosophy; but it all came back to Jenny, and that which she stood for—the breach of a plain moral law—in the end. It was no relentless, fantastic circle of fate, no grinding of nether or any other mill-stones from which escape was impossible; it was just simply Jenny, and that which of necessity she brought him, and that which he—Colthurst admitted it—equally brought her, payment of the wages of a common sin.

Perhaps, admitting this, he should have cried 'quits,' and let the matter rest; but that was asking too much of his forbearance and sense of justice as yet. The last

payment she had made him was too recent, too insolent, too degrading, so it seemed to him. Just now he hated her. Hated her with the intensity with which we can alone hate that which compels us, in self-defence, to fall back on our lower nature. It was through the baser part of him she had tempted him years ago. It was in the baser part of him he had sought and found protection just now. Remembering his own cruel words hurled at the cowed, in a way, defenceless woman; remembering the odious little incident of the scattered stumps and crayons, Colthurst called himself a cad and a cur. But she had driven him to it; and what guarantee had he that she might not drive him to as bad or worse again? Here was a despair, low, immediate, practical, and therefore far more really searching and poignant, than any of the pompous, high-sounding ones he had so lately propounded.

And then leaning out of the window, looking down at the grey pavement, that drop of fifty feet presented itself in another aspect. So far he had treated it merely speculatively, for, at bottom, Colthurst despised suicide. It had always struck him as a lamentable confession of weakness and inadequacy; as a very crude fashion, at once stupid and showy, of cutting the knot. But now—for he reasoned it all out with that untempered lucidity, that unsparing logic, which is proof not of clearness of mind, but of a mind unhinged by nervous exhaustion, the terrible logic and lucidity of a sleepless night, when the

vitality ebbs and imagination runs madly riot in the small hours before the dawn—now thinking of Jenny, and the baseness to which she had pushed him and might push him again—(had not that old dream truth in it? Was it not the forecast of all this? Was not Jenny Parris and that which she symbolized the invisible power forcing him out and out to the edge of the luminous ring, one day to fling him over into the infinite of blank space?)—now suicide appeared not so much an act of defective moral courage, as of the finely-tempered courage which prefers martyrdom to apostasy. This seemed to him the final and permanent escape from Jenny, the final and complete payment of these same ugly wages of sin. But for her he would have died three years ago in the fly-blown garret of that *hôtel garni* in Paris. She had kept life in him at the sacrifice of what remained to her of good fame; thereby, making his life hers, in a sense, not his own. She had given his life back to him, but given it back polluted. And—the deluge was not after all an universal one, for sweet influences from out of his recent efforts at chivalry and noble conduct clung to Colthurst still— that pollution was to him unbearable, better washed off by the waters of the river of death even than not washed off at all. The selfish desire for mere rest was gone. It had given place to a distinct temptation; but the temptation can hardly be called an ignoble one as it presented itself to Colthurst in that moment of exaggerated feeling. He was tempted to lose

his life, lose the life of the animal on the bare chance, the very remote chance—for it was no more after all to him—of saving that of the spiritual man.

'Yet, it seems hard,' he said, 'a trifle hard to be called upon to throw everything overboard at three-and-thirty.'

He drew his right knee up on to the window-ledge, and leaned out still farther, grasping the outer edge of the stone sill with both hands. It was characteristic of Colthurst's nature that even at this somewhat tremendous juncture the cool, calculating element in him asserted itself. He abhorred a bungle. He required to do things neatly. He wished now to assure himself that the height was sufficient, that no projection of doorway or window cornice would interfere to break the fall. He even wished the asphalt was less sloppy. It looked messy, unpleasant. He wondered, oddly enough, about the sparrows. When it happened, would they be frightened into seeking refuge upon the shiny slated roofs opposite? or would they only flit away a yard or two, and then flit back to peep and chatter, and inspect that which lay inert on the pavement with bright, inquisitive, half-derisive little eyes?

Colthurst drew up the other knee, stood upright on the narrow sill, pressing the palms of his hands against the jamb of the window on either side. The bottom of the frame of the open sash was just on a level with his forehead. That was tiresome, cramping. He would have preferred a clear

space, absence of all obstruction. And then, by a grotesque turn of fancy, the image of a conjuror's dog he had once seen jumping through red-covered hoops at a fair came to his mind—lowering its head, flattening itself out, laying its fore-paws together as it leapt.

For a moment he looked at the masses of sun-gilded vapour trailing eastward; listened to the hoarse roar of the streets. A passion of regret for all that the earth has to show, which he would never see, for all life has to make known which he would never learn, came over him; for the ruin of his high hopes of artistic reformation; for the pictures haunting his brain, which he would never paint; for his fruitless love, the love he would never tell to the woman who had inspired it—a love still-born, destroyed before it had tasted the joy of existence. And then he thought of Dot—his own flesh and blood, as Jenny had said to him—poor, shrewd, naughty, bastard, little Dot. What would become of her? Would she go the same ugly way her mother had gone?

Clearly it would be wiser to make short work, to put a final and effectual stop to all this thinking.

Colthurst brought his heels together upon the ledge, lifted his hands from the jambs of the window, placed them palm to palm, took a long breath, looked down; the height was giddy standing here.

Just then the sparrows started upward in hurried, jerky flight.

'Ah, they're flown!' he cried, involuntarily, out loud.

The sky above, the pavement below, the surrounding buildings, seemed to rock, to reel together in horrible, formless confusion. He had a sense of loss of balance, of slipping, of clutching at something, of a jar right through him, of a shatter of breaking glass, of moving figures, voices, laughter.

He believed that it was all over, that he had fallen; suffered a ghastly fear, too, since he still heard, saw, thought, that though the body dies consciousness may remain. Then gradually he became aware that he was standing upon the landing once more; that he had tipped back in losing his balance, not forward; that he had clutched the bottom of the window-sash and pulled it down along with him, forcing his hands through a couple of panes of glass; aware that the doors of the medical school, at the far end of the quadrangle, were open, and that the students were trooping out; aware that Mary Crookenden's stately mulatto nurse, a flaring scarlet and gold handkerchief above her patient dusky face, was slowly ascending the steps leading to the art school entrance; aware that shuffling footsteps—Mr. Barwell's probably, the good man was going to take a look at the costume model still posing in the class-room there, and at the twenty young ladies still busily drawing her—were coming upstairs.

Colthurst was dazed and faint. Mechanically he dusted the grit from the window-ledge off the knees of his trousers;

saw one hand was cut and bruised, wiped away the blood. As to his escape, he hardly took that in as yet. The feeling uppermost in his mind was one of dull self-mockery. It was pitifully ignominious to have gone so far and no further, to have taken so much trouble for nothing. He jeered at himself in sombre self-contempt; yet he was sensible of a need—the sight of the old coloured woman had stirred it in him—a need, whatever happened, to see Mary Crookenden once again.

Chapter VIII.

The injured-looking widow who presides over the ladies' cloak-room had just retired, after informing Miss Crookenden that her servant was waiting for her. She belonged to that congenitally feeble order of persons who are perpetually guilty of small awkwardnesses; consequently the handle slipped through her fingers as she went, causing the door to slam loudly behind her. The sound echoed round the great room, and up to the domed roof. And as the clamour died away, Mary, standing before the easel sorting the anatomical plates she had been consulting and returning them to their red-covered portfolio, suddenly became aware of James Colthurst's presence, and of his rapid, whispering, hesitating accents as he addressed her.

'Are you g-going? M-must you go, Miss Crookenden? It is quite early yet.'

Mary set a high value on Mr. Colthurst's instruction; but just now she was tired. The atmosphere of the studios on this enervating spring day did not tend to the generation of an ardent thirst for labour. She was sorry to waste the chance of receiving an extra lesson, but she really wished to depart. Moreover, she had promised to drop in to tea with Miss Aldham on her way home. Lady Alicia Winterbotham and Violet were to be there. And at this period Mary took a lively interest in Miss Winterbotham. She tried hard to like that very pretty and alert little lady very much indeed.

'Of course, it will end in her marrying Lance,' she told herself, 'and I must be great friends with the dear boy's wife.'

Yet Mary had to admit the friendship did not spring up as rapidly and strongly as she could have desired. It was a plant, apparently, demanding a vast amount of cultivation. She really was very conscientious. She raked, and hoed, and watered and trained, and shone as sunnily in little compliments and attentions as she knew how upon the plant, with the result that Miss Winterbotham repeatedly declared her to be 'quite too dear and delightful for words.' Still something was lacking which should lie at the heart of friendship. Mary knew that. She hoped the fault was in herself.

She wished—for subtle reasons, not wholly undiscoverable, I trust, to an acute reader—to entertain the highest possible opinion of Miss Winterbotham. She was most unwilling to recognise the minutest rift within the lute of the young girl's charms. And it was with the hope of convincing herself that Miss Winterbotham was really and after all riftless, completely sound, she was hurrying to Miss Aldham's small tea-party now. Her mind at this moment ran far more upon her cousin's possible bride than upon Mr. Colthurst and her own anatomical studies, and so her smile, as she turned to answer Colthurst, was slightly perfunctory, impersonal, a mere veiling of the wish to be left to her own devices.

'It is very good of you to come in to see my drawing,' she said, 'but, really, I'm afraid it is hardly worth showing you. I have been disgracefully lazy this afternoon. I am afraid I have done next to nothing. I should much prefer your seeing it a day or two hence, when there is more to criticize.'

It is not easy to step gracefully from the banks of the river of death to the neatly-paved highway of ordinary light social intercourse. Colthurst's retina still retained a pretty vigorous impression of the rush and swirl of those dark waters. He could not succeed in making the transit with easy indifference. He demanded sympathy, comfort. None were to be got thus. To get them—so it seemed to him, at least—he must compel this fair woman to leave the

said neatly-paved highway upon which she evidently proposed to meet, and to pass him with no more than a civil bow, compel her to stand by his side on the banks of that awful, all-engulfing stream.

'I d-did not come to see your d-drawing, Miss Crookenden,' he said. 'I came t-to see you.'

Thanks to his excessive stammering, Mary did not gather the full significance of this announcement, but her attention was arrested by his manner. Her smile faded, giving place to a certain wondering and startled distress. To mental suffering—specially when inflicted by herself—our young lady has on one or two occasions, I fear, shown herself somewhat callous. Physical suffering, however, affected her very differently. Its appeal was immediate, her response equally immediate. Miss Crookenden, beneath her little airs and graces, her touch of coldness, of languor, her very real and not unadmirable pride, had retained much of the capacity of passionate pity which had made her, ten years ago, fling herself face downward among the heather in Slerracombe Deer Park and cry her heart out over the death-squeak of a rabbit. And Colthurst just now bore undeniable marks of suffering upon him. His face was almost livid. It had a kind of ravaged look on it; it was seamed with hard lines. His narrow, unshadowed eyes were at once dull and wild. His habitual restlessness was accentuated. He could not keep still; he moved to and fro with the disquiet of exhaustion, like

one tossing in fever. His usually upright and active, though heavy, figure was all slouched together. Miss Crookenden was only accustomed to behold her fellow-creatures in the well-groomed, full-fed, excellently finished condition common to civilised society. Colthurst's disordered appearance struck her, therefore, all the more forcibly. She had never seen any one look like this before.

'What has happened?' she asked. 'You are ill—you are in pain.'

Colthurst tried to answer that nothing had happened, nothing was the matter, but his stammer got altogether the better of him. At no time was it a noisy stammer; it was not noisy now, but it was persistent, absolute. Fight against it as he might, wrench at his shirt collar, put forth all the energy left in him to overcome it, he could not articulate an intelligible word.

Then, indeed, it did seem to him he had reached the nadir; that he was drinking the very dregs of the day's cup of humiliation. For this revolt on the part of his body, this refusal of obedience, this breaking of the natural connection between the material and mental parts of himself in his present overwrought, highly nervous condition, was frightful. The city was divided against itself; his foes, in the most literal and practical sense of the phrase, were of his own household.

He flung himself down on the wooden bench running round outside the rail that pens off the space allotted to

the model's platform. Spread out his hands with a gesture of despairing self-disgust, and looked up dumbly at Mary Crookenden ?

And shall we think the less well of Miss Crookenden because in response to that look and gesture the snow melted somewhat ? Because she ceased to consider the minor proprieties very carefully ? Because she listened to the voice of her womanhood, rather than to the voice of conventional discretion ? Because, in short, she behaved as a pure-minded person and not as a prude ?

'Ah,' she said, gently, quickly, 'pray don't be so distressed. Wait a little; rest. Don't try to speak yet.'

She was strangely moved, willing to make concessions.

'Never mind my engagement. I can wait if you wish me to wait. And you do wish it, I think,' she said.

For all answer Colthurst held out his hand, still looking up. He was not dangerous, dominating, possessive, intrusive, just then. Genii, bear and cat alike were banished. The dæmonic element was in abeyance. Only the human creature was left—the human creature hunted, exhausted, utterly weary from the tearing of devils it had, after all, striven not ungallantly to cast out—asking for a trifle of kindness, of sympathy, for the simple yet profound consolation which a friendly human touch alone can give.

For a just perceptible space Mary Crookenden hesitated. Then calmly, with a lift of her head, and a fine seriousness

tempering the yielding gentleness of the action, she placed her hand in his. The sister of charity thinks it no shame to let the sick, pain-racked head rest if needs be upon her bosom. Mary, recognising the supreme claim of suffering, thought no shame either, as Colthurst's quick, deft fingers closed quietly, steadily, without emphasis or accentuation of pressure, upon hers. And so they waited, she standing, he sitting, looking gravely at one another, hand in hand.

The great red-walled room was still—the only witnesses of this scene, an anatomical figure exalted on its pedestal, a skeleton hanging meekly hideous from its little wooden gallows, not being companions of the talkative sort. While the atmosphere of it was rich with a warm diffused brightness, reflected down through the skylights from the surface of those masses of sun-gilded cloud still moving in slow procession across the pale clearness of the spring sky. The roar of the streets was hushed here to little more than a drowsy hum of bees. Colthurst had prayed for repose. It was granted him—good measure pressed down and running over, for the next few minutes at least. —Minutes which seemed to him an eternity in the depth of their healing peace. Minutes without past or future; plucked out of the heart of turmoil; sanctified, set apart. Minutes during which the great millstones ceased grinding, or seemed to cease—alas! perhaps it was mostly seeming;—during which Time's hurrying feet were stayed; and the shadow standing at high noon on the face of the

dial, paused, crept no further towards sun-setting and the night. Minutes during which the tormenting, tragic riddle of sex seemed solved; the baser part obliterated from it; appetite vanquished in the apprehension of a relation sweeter far than any earthly marriage—the maid retaining the completeness of her innocence, the man blessed, unvexed by the ache that comes alike of desire and of satiety. For the first time in his urgent, restless life Colthurst knew what it is to be content.

With Mary Crookenden, of necessity, the experience was different. She had given Colthurst her hand in purest pity, in the unreasoning instinct to soothe him—somehow, anyhow, as one soothes a suffering child or dumb beast, careless of the means so long as the end is gained. But as the minutes drew on in that strange, all-pervading quiet, the character of her sentiment changed. The snow melted, the stream ran faster, the channel widened, deepened, the current gained in volume and in force. That same rage of living, stilled for the time being in Colthurst, began to stir in Mary Crookenden;—passed into her, perhaps (my sense of probability is not greatly staggered by the supposition), through the steady clasp of his hand; but stirred in her purer, more lawful, by as much as her mind was more unstained than his. Hints, vague as yet, and misty, half-seen shapes of what life, love, and the inexhaustibly various spectacle of this majestic world—of what these may be to the elect, to

those who have faith and courage enough to sing the 'Song of the Open Road,' began to dawn on her. Heretofore she had lived on, looked at, the surface chiefly. She had even affected a cynicism now and again—the cynicism of ignorance, of limitation of experience. Now she began, feebly as yet, doubtingly, wonderingly, to apprehend the soul which lies in all things, beyond the mere outward sense and seeming of them. She was awed and amazed. Her eyes lost their simplicity of pity, grew troubled, ceased to give. Began to question, to ask, and out of the treasure-house of her own awakening nature, to receive. For the man these few minutes held a baptism of water to the washing away of sin. For the woman they held a baptism of fire to the quickening of the spirit.

But because that same 'Song of the Open Road' cannot be sung without strain of brain and imagination, of moral and spiritual fibre, the novice masters but a line of it, hardly that often, at a time. The harmonies of it are too full and rich, the rhythm at once too subtle and too vast—flowing, like the flowing tide when the wind sweeps in behind it from the ocean, and the great grey-green rollers swing up and break, and break again, along the shouting beach. To Mary Crookenden the stress of stillness, and of the strong working of apprehension, became painful in its intensity. Mutely, almost timidly, as one who asks a favour rather than exercises a right, she made a motion to withdraw her hand. Colthurst let it go without any de-

monstration of farewell. The episode had been perfect. His taste revolted against marring that perfection by the introduction of any common-place, of sullying it by the most distant hint of flirtation or intrigue.

So he sat still, watching the girl as she went back to the easel, and recommenced the process of packing up her drawing things. The best was over. High noon was passed; the shadow broadened, and crept on again over the face of the dial, but the sun was some way from setting yet. For it was infinitely pleasant to sit thus and watch her, without apology in that pause of permitted silence. There are exquisitely constituted persons, whose smallest and most familiar actions are marked by a certain distinction. Mary Crookenden was among the number of these. Her movements were an admirable combination of decision and measured grace. Colthurst watched them with delight, but with a growing sense of regret. Soon she would have finished. Then she would speak or he must; and he feared any speech would of necessity go to break the charm, and reintroduce the conventional, social element. He counted the sticks of charcoal as Mary packed them away in her pencil case, wishing their number were larger and that thus the process might be lengthened out.

It so happened that the last stick but one snapped. The longer half of it fell on to the floor and rolled across almost to his feet. He stooped, picked it up, rose and

went over to the easel. The girl's eyes were still grave, still troubled, and her face was slightly flushed; but she looked full at Colthurst, without a trace of self-consciousness as she took it from him.

'You are better?' she said.

'Thanks to you—yes.'

The charm was not broken after all. Colthurst gathered himself together. His old energy was reviving. There was much he longed to say to Miss Crookenden—now, while the charm was still upon them both. He spoke low, in rapidly uttered sentences, hesitating distressingly at first, almost giving way again, yet he spoke.

'It is u-useless to try to thank you,' he said. 'You have done more for me than you know—than I have any w-wish you should know.'

Mary was silent, but attentive, still unself-conscious.

'I have b-been in hell this afternoon,' Colthurst stammered. 'Not the theologians' hell, in which an utterly just and merciful Deity is reported to roast poor wretches everlastingly for slight errors of doctrine; b-but in one of the ordinary, every-day hells above ground, which we human beings display such elaborate ingenuity in preparing for ourselves and each other.'

Colthurst's words and his manner were curiously at variance. The former were harsh enough and to spare; the latter was quiet, gentle even. He smiled a little at Miss Crookenden as he spoke.

'Ah! depend upon it, that hell-making business is one we can quite be trusted to manage for ourselves,' he said. 'We need no supernatural intervention to perfect our work. Dante, with his stage machinery of ice, and fire, and pitchforks, is out of it. All the required effects can be p-produced at a far cheaper rate than that.'

He waited a moment, trying to keep himself in hand, trying to prevent breaking the charm, by any exaggeration of bitterness. Yet remembering Jenny, remembering the asphalt and the sparrows it was difficult. Bitterness surged up in him, all the fiercer, more acrid by contrast with his late realisation of content and peace.

'B-but I have no wish to treat you to an essay on the *Inferno*,' he said, presently. 'That would be a dreary sort of return to make you. I only want to express some of the gratitude I bear you. I thank you for leading me out of the *Inferno*—bringing me from the stifling darkness of the pit into the fresh air and light again.'

Mary made a gesture of repudiation.

'I know you don't understand—that makes no difference,' Colthurst went on. 'I had ten times rather you did not understand. B-but the fact remains. I was desperate, and you have reconciled me—mad, and you have made me sane again. You have worked a miracle of healing. I was consumed by self-contempt; you have been very gracious, very patient with me, and so in my own eyes I am no longer quite contemptible. Most people

are chary of giving up life, have rather a superstitious reverence for their own existence. I don't share that superstition. To live, sometimes, is merely to perpetuate one's own disgrace.'—Again almost uncontrollable bitterness welled up in him. He had an access of stammering painful to witness.—'I felt that was p-pretty clearly the case with me just now. I am still a little doubtful whether my life is worth saving; but such as it is, you have saved it. You have d-done more. Your purity has cleansed it, your pity, your kindness, for a while at all events, have wiped out my sense of disgrace.—You don't understand. As I tell you, that is of no consequence. There is a good deal a woman such as you had better never understand about a man like me.—I seem to be talking wildly. In saying all you have done for me, I seem to be claiming too much.'

Every human being who is more than a mere bundle of clothes labelled with a name, has his hours of effulgence, I suppose. Hours when the best possible of his moral and spiritual capacity makes itself felt. When the veil of flesh grows thin, and the unlovely accretions formed by habit, greed, sin, the false philosophies and false modesties which this foolish world has taught him, fall away from him, and the divine image in which at the beginning he was made, the divine type, to which in the end—as we believe—he will of necessity conform, stands plainly revealed, giving him for the time being a certain

grandeur and splendour of bearing. Something of this strange splendour was visible in James Colthurst just now. He moved further away from the beautiful girl, carrying himself well and proudly, gazing at her with a worship in which there was no slavishness, yet no hint of offence.

'B-but I don't really claim much, b-believe me,' he said. 'F-for I love you. I l-love you, and I never expect, never hope, will never ask, God helping me, to come one step nearer you than I have come in the last half-hour.'

There was a silence of some duration. Colthurst broke it. He meant to say the whole of his say, but he did not care to look at Mary Crookenden as he said it. He stared down at the boarded floor.

'I know a good deal about love, more than is creditable, perhaps, or profitable. I have had a pretty full experience. I can gauge the quality of my own emotions very fairly accurately by now. I know which promise to be permanent, which are only evanescent.'—Colthurst raised his eyes to the girl's face again, the dignity had come back into his bearing. 'And the love I bear you is unlike that I have ever borne any other woman. I did not know a man could love as I love you. I thank you for teaching me the secret. It is superb—it—it is cruel. It strings up lax moral sinews as a red-hot iron strings up lax bodily sinews. It is a tremendous remedy, but it

cures. Perhaps it also kills—I don't know about that, and I don't care.—P-pray do not imagine that I am making an appeal to you, Miss Crookenden, trying to work upon your feelings in an underhand sort of way. Understand I want nothing from you that most men want in return for their love. I want absolutely nothing, except this—to tell you that my love for you is there, established not to be shaken—there, definite, in full possession of me, always, waking and sleeping—never letting me go, holding me whether I like it not. It has mastered me, driven out all possibility of lower, baser, easily gratified sorts of love. It reigns alone. And—and it is hopeless—hopeless. And'—he broke out passionately, the bitterness surging up resistless, uncontrollable at last—'may God in His mercy—if, indeed, there is a God—keep it hopeless, keep me intending, fully determined that it shall be hopeless; keep me feeling, as I feel now, that the worst of all conceivable anguish would be to snatch a happiness which might end in the scorching of your beautiful feet in the flames of my private hells.'

Mary Crookenden had gone back to the chair at her easel, and sat down. She put one hand over her eyes with a sort of shuddering sigh. She wanted to shut out the sight of Colthurst's ravaged face. She wanted to get momentary relief from her overpowering awareness of his strong, and, as it appeared to her, fateful presence. She

felt as though she was losing her footing, stumbling blindly in regions unknown and abnormal. Her old, unreasoning panic fear of Colthurst began to reassert itself. Other men had professed love for her, as we know; but it was love of quite another pattern. Their vows and ardours had been frequently entertaining, frequently frankly tiresome. All, save Lancelot's—and Mary earnestly and persistently strove to deny the existence of any sentiment tenderer than legitimate cousinly devotion on the part of the goodly youth—all had been dipped in a certain social glaze, which had rendered the surface of them uniform and deprived it of any rough, arresting, adhering quality. Sir Theophilus O'Grady, it is true, had vowed he should blow out his small modicum of brains if the young lady refused the handsome offer of his hand and heart. But Mary failed to be greatly impressed by these threats of self-destruction. She felt pretty secure he would think better of them by the time he had finished his dinner; and so, indeed, he did. The cartridges continued to repose innocuously in the respective chambers of his revolver until such time as he diverted himself by taking pot-shots out of window at certain amorous cats disporting themselves on the leads at the back of his rooms in St. James's Place. But this declaration of Colthurst's was altogether new, unique both in form and in the prospect it opened. It did not occur to Mary to doubt its truth. There was in it a ring of abso-

lute sincerity. And that made it all the more startling, disquieting. The girl was nonplussed, her faculties paralysed by the strangeness of the position. She did not know what she felt; still less did she know what to say.

A considerable pause followed. Again Colthurst was the first to speak.

'Y-you are angry,' he said. 'I d-disgust you.'

'Oh! no no, you don't disgust me. Why should you disgust me? But you bewilder me. You make me very sad,' Mary answered. She had grown pale again. She had much ado to control herself. Her lower lip trembled.

'I am sorry I m-make you sad,' Colthurst said, gently.

He had recovered himself, but it was difficult to him to keep quite still. He took an end of charcoal off the easel-tray, and began crumbling it absently between thumb and finger, watching the dry, brittle flakes as they floated downward in a small dusky cloud.

'And yet I don't know that I need be sorry,' he went on. 'Perhaps it will do you no harm to be a little sad, even for such an unworthy cause as me. The light natures can't stand sadness. It sours them, deprives them of the paltry use they might otherwise have had. Best leave them alone to fizzle out anyhow in an atmosphere of congenial frivolity. But the strong natures can stand it. It braces and enriches them. You are strong. And so you had better accept it without whimpering or shirking. In the end you must accept it, unless you voluntarily, of set

purpose, condemn yourself to sterility, refuse to live to the full of your own capacities.'

Colthurst's fingers were still. He glanced up at her—a glance at once gentle and compelling.

'D-don't refuse,' he said. 'A-at your peril you refuse. Believe me all the noblest thought, noblest work, noblest friendship is rooted and grounded in profound sadness. Those divine few minutes you gave me just now, standing here, letting me hold your hand, were the direct outcome of sadness so searching, so undoing, that it nearly —well—we needn't dwell on it—but, as I told you, it nearly made me throw up the game.'

'Ah! that is too much. You make it all terrible,' Mary Crookenden cried, and the tears started hot and smarting into her eyes.

'I d-don't make it,' Colthurst stammered. 'It m-makes itself.'

He was silent for a little while, his fingers crumbling the charcoal again in their neatly violent way, the brittle flakes falling faster.

'I suppose you call yourself a Christian, Miss Crookenden?' he said, suddenly.

Mary bowed her head in assent.

'Well, then, it is obvious that you are bound to explain the universal riddle precisely by sadness, and nothing else. For the history of Christianity is about the saddest thing out, whether you hold the sublime old creed, which

commands you to worship the founder of it as God—God betrayed, outraged, murdered, by the creatures of His own making who, with infinite compassion, He came down from heaven to save. Or whether you incline to the modern theory of the arrogant young Jew of genius, the dramatic character of whose trial and public execution generated a morbid sentiment which has deluded humanity for close on nineteen hundred years, and drenched both the Old World and the New in blood. Take it either away, I don't think sadness can go much farther than that. Sad!' Colthurst repeated, quietly, as the last of the little charcoal cloud sank on to the floor.—'Sad, everything's sad, fair things and foul things alike. Lies are sad. Truth just as sad—there's not a pin to choose between the two in that respect. And yet, somehow, I am sure I don't know why,' he added, smiling, looking at Mary Crookenden with a certain exaltation—'truth, which just now I take to mean virtue, purity, honesty—a fight to keep one's life from henceforth clean—truth is adorable, lies damnable, all the same.'

But even as he spoke, the charm was broken. And to him it seemed night came with a rush, the sun dropped like lead below the horizon, darkness covered the face of the dial. The cause was simple enough. Nothing more dire than the voice of the hall porter announcing:—

'A gentleman in the office, sir, to see you on business.'

While at the same moment the door high in the wall of

the theatre creaked slightly as Adolphus Carr's well-preserved person presented itself upon the narrow balcony. If the air is highly charged with the magnetism of sentiment, you must be obtuse, indeed, if you have no suggestive twitches and tinglings on first inhaling it. Colthurst and Miss Crookenden were standing beside the young lady's easel in the centre of the large room; their attitudes were ordinary enough, still Mr. Carr received an impression that his advent was pre-eminently untimely, that it had arrested the completion of a somewhat moving drama. He suffered an instant of acute indecision. Then with laudable discretion he requested himself politely but firmly to ignore and indeed if possible obliterate the said impression. He raised his *pince-nez* and gazed, mildly attentive, at the anatomical figure, exalted, one skinless arm extended, upon its red pedestal.

In the brief interval Miss Crookenden's manner had become reserved to the point of frigidity. She lifted her drawing-board down off the easel, and took up her pencil-case, with deliberation. She wanted to go, but she, also, wanted her exit to be dignified, without any effect of haste. In passing she bowed to Colthurst. She did not propose to speak. But Mary was not altogether mistress of herself. As she bowed she glanced at Colthurst, and a vague anxiety for him, a strange drawing towards him, half attraction, half alarm, impelled her after all to address him.

'You are better,' she said. 'You will not, you must not, throw up the game.'

The sun had set. But for Colthurst there was an after-glow, a flush of unlooked gladness and splendour.

'N-no,' he stammered, 'no, not just yet any way.—Putting an end to it all is a thing one can do any time, after all. I-it's among the things that will keep.'

Then he went to interview Mr. Carr in the office. Professor Sylvester, finding leisure profitable both to health and the painting of pictures, had sent in his resignation. The Council desired that Colthurst should be sounded. If it was offered him, would he undertake the permanent directorship of the Connop Trust School ?

BOOK V.—TWO IDYLLS.

'L'amour est l'enfant de la Bohême.'

CHAPTER I.

THE victoria bowled along at a round pace. The horse had not been out of the stable much lately, and was lively in consequence. But Miss Crookenden's irreproachably appointed groom drove well, and the young lady herself was not troubled with nerves. Indeed, she found exhilaration in the sharp pace, shaving of wheels and corners, forging ahead through the thronging stream of traffic. Miss Crookenden wore what she was pleased to describe as the 'one tidy frock she had left'—the blue-grey, silver breast-plated garment with which we are already acquainted. Over it, she had on a little cut-away coat of the same colour, a rolled beaver collar to it, high-standing at the back. The wind had changed during the night. There was a point of north in it giving it a drying, invigorating quality—a sufficient edge of sharpness to justify the wearing of a trifle of fur, though April and spring were here.

Spring, indeed, was very sensibly here. London, like Miss Crookenden, had put on its tidy frock, which, like hers, was a sufficiently smart one. A certain indefinable

go and swing was in the air, something of the vernal excitement which makes plants sprout and blossom, birds sing and pair. London looked, as it can very much look at times, massively brilliant in a broad spread lustre of sunshine, under a sky continental in height and cloudless intensity of colour. Parliament met early that year, I remember, and there was a good deal of season before Easter. Most private houses were open, their window-gardens radiant with tulips and crocuses, an awning already put out here and there. In the parks and squares the chestnuts were breaking into flower, pyramids of pink and white bud standing bravely erect amid the tossing foliage; while a veil of fragile green was drawing over the heads of the sooty branched elms. Oh! palpably visibly the Spirit of Spring was abroad, and that not in his coy, tender-hearted, tearful humour. To-day he was gay, glittering, tumultuous, a bit of a rake. His hat was tipped over his ear, and his eyes danced with expectation and mischief as his feet beat the London flags. He permitted himself to cast a gallant glance at every pretty woman he met. Finally he stepped into Miss Crookenden's victoria, and seated himself in the vacant place beside her; bade her drive dull care away, enjoy her own youth, wealth, and beauty, shake off a distrust and melancholy which haunted her, and find life glad, diverting, sweet once more.

Mary had not gone to the Connop School this morning.

The very thought of the place made her cheeks burn, made her stiffen with pride—or was it modesty?—made her shrink away, try not to remember, not to see and hear a scene and words imprinted upon her mind with extreme clearness. The law of reaction was in full operation. It sent her *volte face* in the other direction. And this,—by the operation of another law, that of contraries,—all the more hastily, urgently, because a strange attraction drew her thoughts back again and again to the very scene, and words from which she shrank. This sounds paradoxical. But paradox is king, if you look close enough over most human hearts and over the bulk of human conduct likewise. Specially does he reign supreme in the thoughts, actions, affections of that endlessly interesting and somewhat abnormal product of our nineteenth century civilization the—modern girl. So, in obedience to the cross working of these laws, in obedience to the mandate of King Paradox, instead of being at the Connop Trust School by ten a.m., arrayed in workmanlike garments, Mary, accompanied by Mrs. Chloe, had walked to Little and Randeggar's in Sloane Street; and there, after much deliberation over rival sumptuousnesses 'in the piece, had selected a dove-coloured brocade with knots of pale pink and amber roses scattered over it, which unquestionably would make up into a divinely lovely tea-gown. Subsequently she had spent an interesting hour with her dressmaker discussing the important question of spring

toilettes. Just by the way, going out and coming back, she had bought a number of engaging odds and ends, which she didn't particularly want; but which looked so seductive behind the plate-glass of the shop windows that it seemed an almost reprehensible waste of opportunity not to transfer them to the arms or pockets of the statuesque mulatto woman.

Now she had sallied forth to pay a round of rather neglected visits. Madame Jacobini was *hors de combat*, prostrated by headache, hence there was a vacant place upon the dark-blue cushions of the victoria whereon the Spirit of Spring could merrily, audaciously seat himself.

Spring did his best; he chattered away plausibly, glibly, and, I must add, common-sensibly enough, in his bright, caressing, flattering fashion. His talk brought an eagerness into the girl's face. He appeased her taste, her fancy, the softer, weaker side of her with the contemplation of a thousand agreeable trivialities. He called her attention to all that was rich, spacious, luxurious, imposing—and of that the West End of London, you may be sure, presented full harvest on this delightful day. He obliged her to think of yesterday too, and his accent had a ring of worldly-wise mockery in it. He used the words melodramatic, hysterical. Yes, Spring did his best. He tried cajolery, he tried laughter, he tried appeals to the inherent attraction of pomp and circumstance, of light-hearted pleasure, of impressive display. And yet, though Mary

listened willingly, ready enough to be convinced if that might be, another voice continued to mingle with his. Hesitating, broken utterances, struck in harshly across his honeyed phrases and light philosophy of life,—'You are strong, and so you had better accept it without whimpering or shirking; in the end you must accept it unless you voluntarily, of set purpose, condemn yourself to sterility.'

There,—it was a positive relief when the carriage drew up before the Winterbothams' house in Richmond Terrace, Whitehall Place, and the opposing voices were silenced for a while. So far every one on whom she had called had been out. Now her ladyship was out, but Miss Winterbotham was at home. Very well, then, she would see Miss Violet. Being late, Mary had missed her yesterday at Miss Aldham's. It might prove just as well to see her alone thus. Perhaps in a *tête-à-tête* that same stunted flower of friendship might be induced to bud and blossom.

Miss Violet was—is still, I believe, though she has long ceased to bear her maiden name—an exceedingly pretty little person. A certain infantine roundness, downiness, dainty warmth about her suggesting a delicious combination of a dormouse and a ripe cherry. Her eyes alone did not quite please Miss Crookenden. For the latter had, or imagined she had, more than once surprised a singularly wide-awake and mature glance under those softly fringed eyelids, a glance implying possibilities.

To-day, however, no possibilities inconsistent with

innocent playfulness of dormouse or sweetness of ripe cherry obtruded indication of themselves.

The young girl was enthusiastic in her greeting, kissed her guest affectionately on both cheeks, and declared—it was quite too charming for words of her to have come in though Mamma was out. They had both been fearfully disappointed at not seeing her yesterday. It was really ages, perfect centuries, since she—the speaker—'had seen her. And she had perfect oceans to say. Had Mary heard of the great excitement? Victoria Barking's engagement to Lord Sokeington? Everybody said he was just as nice as nice could be, and that Pentstock is the most enchanting old place. They were to be married directly after Easter. And Victoria looked quite too blissful for words, she was quite off her head about him. And of course she was utterly absorbed in her trousseau. What did Mary think about trousseau linen? She'd been with Victoria to a whole host of places this morning looking at things; and that was why she was at home now. She had come in regularly fagged out. Choosing trousseau things was so wearing, you know. Did Mary like lawn, or batiste, or silk best? Victoria inclined to silk. Of course it was rather the thing to have it now; and really some of the little silk shifties and night-i-gowns were simply too trottie for words. They made her'—the speaker—'just a little tiny bit envious. It would be so awfully interesting to be getting them for oneself, you

know. And it must be so delightful to have one so utterly devoted to you as Victoria said Sokeington was. To be The One—you know. He'd given her the most lovely sapphires and pearls—a necklace and pendant. Victoria believed they cost between eight hundred and a thousand. But Mamma thought not as much as that. Sapphires are rather down this year. For her own part, she '—Miss Violet—' preferred diamonds.'

The young lady, it may be observed, in passing, carefully ignored the second vowel and concluding *d*.

'They were more useful on the whole. But then Victoria had got all her poor mother's diamonds, you see, so she could do very well for the present. Of course all the Barkings were off their heads about the marriage, though they really hadn't worked it the least. It wasn't in the least a put up job. That was the charming part of it. Victoria declared she never was more surprised in her life than when he came to the point, though of course it had been a good deal talked about. He proposed, going down to Sandown, on the top of Mr. Abel Barking's drag. Victoria thought they both got through it splendidly, for it was difficult to do it just in the way of ordinary conversation, don't you know, without anybody making out what was going on. She '—Violet—' was sure she should never have nerve to settle that sort of thing casually on the top of a drag. Because after all it must make you rather hot—didn't Mary think so?

Supposing she was choosing, where did Mary think it would be nicest to be proposed to?'

Thereupon the hesitating, whispering voice broke in across Miss Winterbotham's high treble, while the brightly furnished drawing-room turned into a great bare, red-walled place.—'I love you, and my love is hopeless, and God in His mercy keep me knowing, determined that it shall be hopeless.'

Ah! stammering tongue, for pity's sake be still, don't trouble us. What have we to do with sorrow, catastrophe, with 'loves that never find their earthly close' now in pairing time, while Spring wears his hat so jauntily tipped upon his ear? Be silent, leave us undisturbed to think in peace about matters of real weight and moment,—such, for instance, as Victoria Barking's sapphires and silk chemises.

'Of course, there are the bridesmaids' frocks to settle about,' the young lady continued. 'They're fearfully interesting. And Victoria wants to strike out a new line which makes settling all the more wearing. They will have to be settled about at once, because I must try mine on before we go. You know we're going to Slerracombe for the Easter recess? It was quite too kind and delightful of Mrs. Crookenden to ask us. At first there were fearful agitations, because papa had half promised we would go down to Layton to the Denisons'. But we made him get out of it somehow, though he was rather

worried. The poor dear old Denisons are quite too fussing for words when one stays with them. He's always pounding away at something that wants reforming, you know. And it's fearfully boring always to be talking about things that want reforming, don't you think so? And then I've been simply expiring to see Slerracombe for years. Everybody says it's quite too quaint and delightful —so by itself, and unlike any other place. And that Mr. Crookenden is really quite the best host in the world—so good-natured and always doing nice things for people.'

'Yes, Lancelot is always doing something dear and kind,' Mary said.

'He must be the most delightful cousin,' Miss Winterbotham returned. 'Only'—here Mary fancied she surprised a glance not wholly infantine or unsophisticated from under the pretty, fringed eyelids—'only perhaps it is rather a waste having such delightful people for one's cousins. Of course you're going down there, darling, for Easter?'

Miss Crookenden shook her head and laughed a little.

'Oh! I don't know,' she answered. 'I wait on circumstances. My plans are rather distractingly *en l'air* every way, just at present.'

Miss Winterbotham confounded herself in regrets. Her regrets, indeed, were great almost to the point of incoherence. It shortly appeared that meeting Mary was the central aim and object of the visit to Slerracombe;

notwithstanding which Miss Crookenden rose to depart. The ceremony of the double embrace was repeated. Violet accompanied her guest to the head of the stairs, stood there smiling, dimpling, the softest of dormice, the ripest of cherries.

'Good-bye, darling,' she cried. 'I shall live in hopes. I shall be quite too disappointed for words if you don't turn up. I shall tell Victoria you vote for lawn. And your taste is always so simply perfect I am sure she'll be glad to have your opinion. Look in again soon. It's too charming to have seen you,' and Miss Winterbotham kissed her finger-tips with the most captivating air of affection.

Out into the movement of the bright street again, the brown horse all the gayer for the waiting.

—'The light natures can't stand sadness. Best leave them alone to fizzle out anyhow in an atmosphere of congenial frivolity. But the strong natures can stand it. It braces and enriches them. You are strong——'

'No, no, indeed, I'm not strong,' pleaded Mary Crookenden. 'I don't want to be embraced and enriched. Where's the good of it? I want to enjoy myself. I want to be happy.'

Up Whitehall, through Cockspur Street, across Waterloo Place, into Pall Mall, a dazzle of sunshine in her eyes. But notwithstanding the dazzle she presently saw something which made her order the carriage to cut diagonally across the on-coming stream,—whereupon the driver of a hansom shouted at her groom, while

the foam from his horse's bit bespattered the sleeve of her jacket as he dragged it aside and back on its haunches. Mary, however, was not apologetic. She leaned forward smiling, beckoning as the victoria drew up against the kerb. More than one person observing the young lady's attitude, glanced round to discover who might provoke so flattering a welcome; and passed on again with the sense of having seen a pleasant sight.

For I think the fine old word *debonair* most fitly describes Lancelot Crookenden as he made his way along Pall Mall in the sunshine that April afternoon. His countenance wore an expression of unruffled serenity, which, I hasten to add, was not in the least fatuous. It was too honest, too unostentatious for that. The well-bred young Englishman certainly possesses a happy gift of being smart without being showy. Upon Lancelot, from crown of hat to boot-sole, was neither spot, blemish, wrinkle, nor any such thing. Yet his raiment was as devoid of side as his bearing. It had no offensive newness about it. It was the result of himself, not of his tailor. He bore not the smallest resemblance to a walking advertisement. His clothes were all right—that was all. He himself was all right, likewise—sound, wholesome, in mind and body. Debonair, good to look upon.

'Why, I say, Polly, how awfully lucky to run across you like this.'

A light came into his quiet eyes, a glow into his smooth,

handsome face, as he stood at the edge of the pavement, and contemplated Miss Crookenden.

'You've cut that beastly old drawing school for once then.'

'Yes, I've cut the beastly old drawing school, as you gracefully put it, for once,' she answered.

Violet Winterbotham was quite right. He really was a delightful possession in the way of a cousin. Delightful to the point of waste? Well, perhaps that was a question.

'I wanted a little change of ideas. I am taking a whole holiday.'

'And it's an awfully jolly day for a holiday,' Lancelot said, still contemplating her, still quietly glowing.

'Yes, oh! no doubt it is. I had no notion you were here, Lance.'

'Well, I only came up last night with Calmady. It was rather a sudden thing. He had to come on business, and Lady Calmady could not come with him. She was booked to go up to Scotland to her own people. And I thought she'd be easier if I was on hand, in case he wanted anybody, you know.'

'You are very considerate of Lady Calmady's comfort,' Mary observed; 'but where are you bound for now?'

'Oh! nowhere in particular. I was only fooling about till I thought you'd be home. I meant to look in at tea-time. I thought Madame Jacobini wouldn't mind—she'd let me wait till you came.'

Mary looked away for a moment at the string of passing carriages, bowed to Mr. Quayle coming down the steps of his club, there across the street; then—was it in obedience to some whispered suggestion on the part of that mischievous young rake, the Spring?—she swept her rustling blue-grey and silver skirts over to the further side of the victoria, and laid her hand invitingly on the vacant seat.

'Get in, Lance,' she said. 'You shall come back to tea all the same, if you like; but meanwhile let us fool about together.'

Miss Crookenden smiled very charmingly.

'Fooling alone doesn't amount to much, after all, and I am in the humour for most excellent fooling. Come along, get in.'

'Really?' he asked, slightly incredulous of such good fortune.

'Really and truly—that is, if you care to.'

'Why, of course I care to, Polly,' the young man said.

'But, then, where shall we go? The Park bores you.'

'Well, that rather depends,' Lancelot answered, while he arranged his long legs. 'I don't fancy it will bore me very much this afternoon, somehow.'

Miss Crookenden's eyes treated him to a lingering survey as they sped away up the shady side of St. James's Street. Would Violet Winterbotham make him happy? Mary hoped, almost prayed, that she might. He deserved to be happy—comfortable, reasonable, modest-natured being that

he was. But do the modest natures always get their deserts? Mary caught herself sighing.

Just then they turned into the stir and turmoil of Piccadilly, the long perspective of it stretching out bright ahead; currents of close-packed traffic setting steadily east and west, cabs and carriages showing black against the powdery drab of the roadway, wheel-spokes and panels giving off zig-zags of whiteness in the sunlight; the trample of innumerable hoofs; once a slip and slither, which made Mary turn her head and bite her lip—a crash, a crowd rising up mushroom-like, amazingly immediate, a horse down on its side; omnibuses, laden within and without, towering elephantine amid the press of smaller vehicles; the pavements alive, too, thick and dark, with foot passengers; boys yelling evening papers. Here, breaking the seemingly endless line of house-fronts on the right, a hoarding, a patchwork of many-coloured posters—sauces, tobaccos, Nestlé's Food, full-length portrait of Tottie Vale as Mark Antony in 'Cleopatra Redressed,' jostling announcements of Second Advent meetings at Exeter Hall—alas! poor Tottie, one fears your occupation will be gone with disconcerting completeness whenever that last event takes place:—Above the hoarding masts and spars of scaffolding, rising up against the blue; then a block, the currents momentarily arrested, swerving apart on either side a queer little mid-street encampment—tarpaulin tent, piled wood blocks, brazier full of fiery eyes

before and behind, pale flames leaping off, vanishing in the sunshine amid a swirl of oily vapour, execrable stench of boiling pitch. On the left the Green Park, genuinely green for once, its lawns fresh with springing grass-blades, an azure haze hanging above them in the distance, beneath the avenues of small black-limbed trees.

All this, and much more, Mary Crookenden caught in passing, quick, vivid impressions—to her all the more vivid for that long period of work, of concentrated effort at the Connop School—all weaving themselves in with, quaintly crossing and illustrating certain thoughts which filled her mind, and fought out a sort of triangular duel there. Thoughts of yesterday, and Colthurst, and all that he stood for; of half an hour ago and Violet Winterbotham, and the radically different all which she stood for; of now and Lancelot, and that which he stood for. For how much did he stand? Mary was uncertain—I think, unfortunately. But there was something very soothing, undeniably comfortable, largely protective in his presence, as he leaned back lazily against the dark-blue cushions beside her amid the rush and clamour of the great, brilliant street.

'Lance,' she said, suddenly, as they bore away to the left, round the paviors' encampment, 'you are a splendid sheet-anchor. Virtue goes out of you; you make everything so delightfully probable and unperplexed.'

Lancelot regarded her with a sort of tender amusement.

Polly's talk was frequently a little out of his depth. On the present occasion he did not attach any very definite meaning to her words, but they had a pleasant sound; they conveyed to him the assurance that she didn't find him bad to be with on the whole. And, thereupon, to Lancelot the black-bodied victoria turned into I know not what all of an enchanted love-chariot; the brown horse, his knees up to his nose, and his chest all flecked with froth, into a flight of Venus' doves; the dapper groom into Dan Cupid himself. Ah! Spring and pairing time, what tricks you play, even the most reasonable and modest among us.

'I wonder you haven't more swagger,' the girl went on, in her sweet, grave voice, 'considering how uncommonly good-looking you are.'

'Why, Polly, surely you don't like swagger,' he said, getting rather red and, not unadroitly, begging the question.

'I am not sure. I can't quite make up my mind. I am inclined to believe every woman likes swagger in her heart of hearts. You see if you men have a fine effect of believing in yourselves it helps us to believe in you. And we are infinitely obliged to you for any little helps in that direction, since, even now, as things go you are practically our masters.'

The enchanted chariot turned into the Park. Venus' doves, checked by Dan Cupid, flew slower. For the fine day had brought out not only many dowagers to sun

themselves into semblance of life and gaiety like torpid, last year's flies, but all the world and his wife, and his proverbial seven daughters. The riders were numerous, the string of carriages interminable. A few courageous persons even had sprinkled themselves over the ranges of chairs facing the Row, sparse, rather uncertain as to the wisdom of their own action, like the sparse, fragile leaves sprinkled over the trees behind them.

'But if one's going to swagger one must have something to swagger about, don't you know, Polly?' Lancelot said. He wished the conversation would run in shallower and less bewilderingly personal channels.

'You have plenty, at least you have what most people would consider plenty.—There's old Lady Combmartin glaring at us out of her yellow coach. Bow to her.'

Miss Crookenden herself bowed, smiling brightly. I am afraid she took a naughty pleasure in encountering that venerable lady under existing circumstances. It increased the excellence of the fooling.

'She is shocked. Goodness me, how shocked she is,' she said to herself. 'She will make poor Lady Dorothy write yards to Aunt Caroline about it. Oh! well, let her. *Enfin, il faut payer pour tout.*—To begin with, Lance, in respect of swagger, I mean, there are your uncommon good looks.'

'Oh! I don't know anything about that,' he answered, still rather red. 'You're glad to have your proper complement of arms and legs, of course. But the rest seems

to me rather frills for a man, it doesn't matter one way or the other. Hornidge doesn't drive badly,' he added, looking at the groom's neat back. 'You're satisfied with him? He's steady?'

'Perfectly, as far as I know.'

'He seemed to me a decent sort of fellow. It's wonderful how well these boys out of the Brockhurst stable do turn out,' Lancelot went on, relieved at having hit on a less embarrassing subject of conversation. 'It's all thanks to Lady Calmady. It's wonderful what an influence she has over them.'

Mary's blue eyes sounded the depths of his brown ones for a moment.

'You are very devoted to Lady Calmady,' she said.

'Yes, I am awfully fond of her.' The brown eyes were quiet, absolutely candid. 'Taken all round, she's about—well, I don't know how to put it—it sounds a little like spreading oneself, to say it, somehow; but I think she's just everything one wants a woman to be.'

Mary Crookenden was silent. She turned her graceful head away, glanced at the flower-beds glowing with scarlet and yellow tulips, glanced at the people on the footway. There was Anthony Hammond. He was unmistakable; his coats were getting to crease suggestively round the waist. He was in attendance on Miss White, the player of the banjo, and her mother. How the little American's full silken skirts fluttered as she faced up against the wind!

'I believe I am jealous of Lady Calmady,' Mary said presently. 'And I was envious of her already.'

'Jealous, envious? What do you mean, Polly?' exclaimed Lancelot.

'Yes, I certainly am jealous. You are there so much. And you admire her quite provokingly much.'

Lancelot laughed. He really could not help it. The idea of Polly being jealous on his account was too deliciously absurd. Then he became slightly solicitous. Surely she could not misunderstand how matters stood?

'I like being there because Calmady and she are so awfully happy together,' he said gently, almost reverently. 'I don't mean they make a parade of caring for each other. But you can't help knowing how they do care. You feel it's there, you see, going on all the time. And, well, somehow it seems to do you good.'

'Precisely. And that is what makes me envious. Lady Calmady made a tremendous venture, in the face of criticism——'

'I suppose it was rather a venture,' Lancelot put in reflectively, 'Calmady being so crippled as he is, poor dear fellow. But then Calmady's Calmady. He is worth risking a good deal for. Any way it's all turned out splendidly.'

'Yes, it is easy to be wise after the event. But she could not be sure it would turn out splendidly. She acted in faith. I envy the woman who has courage enough

to trust her own judgment, whatever people say, and to make such a venture. It is fine. I should never have courage enough!'

Miss Crookenden's grave voice had a certain ring in it. Lancelot did not know what she might be thinking of, did not see how Lady Calmady's case bore upon her own. But he has an instinct that she was dissatisfied with herself, that she would like encouragement. There was a fund of generosity in this simple young gentleman. Regardless of self, he gave encouragement.

'Oh! you'd find you had courage fast enough, Polly, if you cared,' he said, smiling at her.

'But how is one to know when one cares?' Mary rejoined. She turned away and nodded over the back of the carriage to Anthony Hammond and his ladies as she spoke.

Lancelot glanced at the delicate contour of her cheek, the soft outstanding of shadowed blonde hair under the upturned edge of her blue-grey and silver bonnet, the easy grace of her blue-grey and silver-clad figure. Then he fixed his eyes steadily, resolutely upon Hornidge, the groom. The outward aspects of his cousin were only too seductive. Lancelot was well aware of that. He tried not to think about them. To his mind there was a touch of unworthiness, a wanting in the perfection of respect in thinking about them. To him Polly was sacred; and, by a turn of feeling which I own appears to me fine rather

than foolish, he therefore reckoned it little short of profane to suffer himself to dwell on the spectacle of her beauty.

'Oh! I don't think it's so very difficult to know whether one cares or not, when one does care,' he said quietly.

But now, fortunately perhaps, for our young people's talk was unquestionably drifting into dangerously sentimental waters, as the carriage turned northward, skirting the railings of Kensington Gardens, who should cross them but Lady Louisa Barking driving her celebrated pair of cobs. Her sister, Lady Alicia Winterbotham, moreover, was with her. The meeting, recognition, acknowledgment on both sides of such recognition was necessarily of the briefest, for the cobs trotted fast and Dan Cupid, escaped from the string, let the doves have their pleasure again as to pace. The meeting occupied but an instant. But in an instant, oh! dear me, how much can be conveyed when there is the intention to convey it! The daughters of the noble house of Fallowfeild disapproved highly; and they contrived very effectually to let Miss Crookenden know as much. Their well-bred countenances, the set of their small and remarkably well-shaped mouths—all the Quayles are wonderfully alike—intimated in the clearest possible manner that, in their opinion, unless the situation was explained by subsequent events—which Heaven forbid, for what then became of Violet's neatly planned little

future ?—Miss Crookenden was guilty of a startling indiscretion, of a grave disregard of social good taste, in thus driving about all alone, right in the world's eye, as you may say, with that very eligible youth, her cousin.

And Mary, after a movement of righteous anger—for what anger is not righteous first off in the estimate of the enraged one ?—at the impertinence of this adverse criticism, was seized with compunction. Her fooling ceased abruptly to have any quality of excellence in it. She feared it was culpably thoughtless, if not positively heartless. Was this the way to promote Lancelot's peace of mind, and push him into Miss Winterbotham's pretty, wide-open arms ? She knew it was not. As our wilful young lady gazed silently at the pleasant sunshiny scene, —the riders, walkers, carriages, the wide road and white bridge spanning the gleaming water of the Serpentine just ahead, the rise of green sward beyond the Powder Magazine dotted with heavy-fleeced sheep, the azure haze, pale repetition of the blue sky above, which overlaid the distance, —trees, houses, vistas between the big elms on the left in Kensington Gardens, with a soft uniformity of tint,—she became a trifle ashamed of herself. With haste, ill-considered haste as it proved in the upshot, she tried to rectify her mistake, to retrieve the position.

'I was coming away from the Winterbothams when I met you,' she said. 'I am so glad they are going to you for Easter. Violet was radiant. It suits her to be radiant.

She really looked quite delicious. I hope you like her, Lance?'

Lancelot had quite recovered his serenity. The look of tender amusement had come back. Mary found that look embarrassing, somehow.

'Oh! yes, I like her well enough. She's a very nice girl as girls go. My mother wrote and told me she'd asked them. But I am afraid I had almost forgotten about it.'

'Don't forget,' Mary said. 'You had much better remember. I am delighted you are going to have them.'

'Are you, Polly? Why?'

Now this really, if you like, was embarrassing. Mary took her courage in both hands.

'Because I want you to like Violet a little extra-much. It would be such a comfort, Lance, such a real comfort to know you found her a great deal nicer than other girls, as girls go.'

Mary's eyes sounded the depths of these honest brown ones again.

'I should be glad to know that,' she said. 'Very glad, indeed. Dear Lance, I am very fond of you, you see. I so want you to be happy.'

For a minute or two only the light crunch of the carriage wheels, and thud of the horses' hoofs on the smooth gravel of the road, voices floating up clear and

shrill from a company of children sailing toy-boats near the Receiving House of the Humane Society, the excited barking of a dog for whom sticks were being thrown into the gleaming water. Then Lancelot said slowly :—

'Well, you know, Polly, if you want me to be happy, it's easy——'

'Oh ! Lance, dear old boy, don't say anything foolish,' Mary broke in hurriedly, imploringly.

She perceived the woful futility of her bit of diplomacy. It had been ill-calculated indeed. It had precipitated the crisis instead of warding it off. She went very hot. The remembrance of Victoria and Lord Sokeington's little affair on the top of that drag of Mr. Abel Barking's intruded itself in the most provoking manner. She desired, genuinely, actively desired, now that it was rather late for such desires, to spare the goodly youth pain.

'Dearest Lance, pray, pray hold your dear tongue. Pray don't say anything foolish. I can't forgive myself for having asked you to drive with me, like this. It was selfish, it was stupid. I shall reproach myself so horribly if you say something foolish.'

'There's nothing to reproach yourself for—nothing in the world,' he answered. 'You've given me an unexpected good time this afternoon, that's all. And I'm not going to say anything foolish—any way it doesn't seem a little bit foolish to me.'

Again the hoof-strokes, the soft crunch of the wheels as

the enchanted chariot rolls onward over the sunny bridge, the yapping of the dog, the children's clear voices. Then, his head held high, his smooth young face rather pale, a tremor about his lips, with a sort of gentle desperation, Lancelot asked her :—

'Polly, will you have me ?'

Chapter II.

As has already been stated, Madame Jacobini had a headache. But, her habitual vivacity notwithstanding, Madame Jacobini also had her pieties. And to-day, if her head had been at its soundest, she would still have remained at home and refused herself to visitors. For this was the anniversary of Signor Jacobini's death. Nine years ago to-day that irascible musician had taken leave of a state of existence with which he had proved himself singularly incapable of coping successfully, and had entered upon that other one in which—I say it with all reverence—one hopes things may be a little less mixed.

For that radical mixedness of things here below had contributed largely to the poor Signor's undoing. His was one of the lop-sided erratic natures which give such an infinitude of trouble to themselves and everybody who cares for them. He belonged to the unlucky order of

persons who possess the temperament of genius without possessing any sufficient practical talent to act as safety-valve and carry off the alarming rush of steam genius is continually in process of generating. Such persons are worthy of all commiseration. In the abstract one regards them with the tenderest pity. In the concrete one too frequently finds them insupportable.

Signor Jacobini was wedded to his art; but I cannot pretend to say the marriage was a happy one. Music was to him a seventh heaven, being caught up into which he heard and saw things unspeakable. Yet, of course, he wanted to speak them. What artist does not? During the period of inception he was ravished with ecstasy—filled with a divine fury. During the period of execution, or attempted execution, he was usually filled with a fury of quite another kind. Alas! his compositions were not even second-rate—second-rate, I mean, among the modest English musical efforts of the day. Poor little things, I am not so cruel as to judge them by any universally obtaining standard; that would indeed be to sink them in the mud. —And, having a measure of clear-sightedness in him, long before the celestial message was set down on the music score, Signor Jacobini had begun to make this lamentable discovery for himself; he became conscious that, ecstasy notwithstanding, he was in the act of producing anything but an immortal work. And then he became anything but good company. He fell upon himself. He tore him-

self to pieces. And, as so often happens in such cases, he involuntarily extended the area of tearing. It began with himself, it went on to his dearest, because his nearest. Madame Jacobini was severely torn too.

But to-day, as she lay back against the piled-up pillows on a sofa in Miss Crookenden's pretty drawing-room—screening her eyes with a fan, alike from the clear fire burning on the tiled hearth, and from the sunlight slanting in through the lace curtains of the further room and chequering the white panelling and the space of elaborately patterned pale apricot-coloured silk damask on the wall above—it was not of these unamiable tearings that Sara Jacobini thought. Four days out of five the poor Signor had been ill to live with; and so his widow just missed out the four, and bade memory dwell only on the fifth, when he had been repentant of ill-temper, child-like, merry with the jovial inconsequent mirth which was commoner a quarter of a century or more ago, I think, than it is in our tiresomely wise and wide-awake to-day. She recalled his witty speeches, his practical jokes, his inimitable gift of mimicry, his inexhaustible fund of anecdote. Oh! decidedly, it seemed to her in looking back on those fifth days, that on them poor dear Jacobini had been capital good company. She had taken him for better and for worse. Now she elected only to remember the better. Not that she took any merit to herself for this. She was spontaneously loyal. At the time she had not made capital

out of her domestic infelicities, and required admiration for cheerful endurance of them. Madame Jacobini belonged to a social period and social stratum in which what I may call the theory of the husband and the comparative anatomy of the honourable estate were not discussed by wives, affectionate or otherwise, with the unsuperstitious freedom customary at present. And she was certainly not going to make capital out of those infelicities now. That would have appeared to her a most ungracious waste of time and energy. Madame Jacobini had no capacity for nursing grudges. She let the dead bury their dead, with all possible despatch, in regard of what was disagreeable. And so it was the brighter aspects—the entertaining, whimsical, pathetic episodes—of her twenty years' experience of married life which held her memory. She pondered these things in her heart as she rested there alone and headachy in the charming white and apricot-coloured room, the atmosphere of it fragrant from the scent of violets and the delicate odour of greenhouse-grown roses —pondered them with liftings of the eyebrows, brief ejaculations, humorous little grimaces, though now and again her eyes filled. Ah! depend upon it, the grass grows none the less fresh and green upon the graves of those we have loved for being warmed by a sunshine of kindly laughter as well as watered by tears.

So Madame Jacobini leant against the pillows and remembered, while the chequered shadow cast by the lace

curtains slipped across damask and panelling nearer to the window. Yes, looking back was sweet on the whole, not bitter. The earthly relation had closed in tenderness; the final scenes, though played out amid poverty and failure, had been peaceful. She had sailed her marriage-ship over troubled waters, and had brought it safely into port at last. And she sighed with a certain movement of gratitude thinking of that.

And then her thoughts passed from the accomplished voyage of her own marriage-ship to other possible hymeneal sailings. She looked forward. She questioned herself as to Mary Crookenden. Frankly, she was not satisfied about the girl. She watched her closely, and it seemed to her that she detected an increasing restlessness—moodiness almost—in her. Mary was reticent. But straws show which way the wind blows. Madame Jacobini was a great observer of straws. The straws gave conflicting evidence in the present case. She was puzzled.

'Her staying at home to-day, after months of early breakfasts, and unheard-of application and diligence'—Madame Jacobini let her fan drop on to her lap—'I do not fathom it. I cannot divest my mind of the notion that the tame Tartar counts for something in the business.'

She unfurled the fan, and again let it drop together with a little rattle.

'I wish the tame Tartar further, oh! distinctly I do,' she said to herself.

Just then the carriage stopped, the bell rang. Miss Crookenden came quickly upstairs and entered the room. She paused just inside the door, and it so happened that the shrinking sunlight fell on the silver embroidery of her dress. She appeared singularly fair and tall, proud as some young Amazon in her glistening armour. Her face was a little hard in expression. Her eyes shone large and sombre amid the colourless lustre of her complexion.

'Asleep, Sara?' she asked.

'No, my dear, not in the very least,' the elder woman replied genially. 'I have been squaring my accounts with the past this afternoon, and I find I have a nice little balance in hand on the side of thankfulness. How goes the world with you?'

'It goes all awry,' the girl answered—'execrably awry. I have not a pen'orth of balance on the side of thankfulness.'

She divested herself of bonnet and over-jacket, and threw them into the nearest chair.

'Your head better?' she asked, pausing in the midst of this somewhat unceremoniously conducted operation.

Madame Jacobini permitted herself to tell a little fib.—'Oh! yes, quite well,' she said, though her eye-balls felt red-hot and seemed to bore back and back into her brain.

'Then there is a trifle to be thankful for after all.'

Mary came over and sat beside her, let herself slip down against the cushions till her head rested on her friend's shoulder, fondled her hands as they rested on her lap.

'Sara, I am in a fix—I am in a hole,' she said. 'I don't quite know what to do. I am pulled in so many different directions. I have come to four cross-roads, and I can't decide which to take. Looking along each I see a lion in the path.'

'Dear me, the visits must have been remarkably eventful,' observed Madame Jacobini.

'Oh! it was not the visits. I took my worriments out with me. But worriments always have power to add to their number. I met Lancelot.' Mary pressed coaxingly a little closer.—'Sara, I want comforting,' she said. 'Would you mind putting your arms around my waist?—so—that's right. You are sure your head's better, and that I don't bother you?—Generally, you know, I can keep the dear boy in order and prevent his burning his fingers; but to-day I was stupid and self-absorbed, thinking about the cross-roads and the worriments. It was horrid of me; I ought to have been more careful; and he burnt his fingers badly—very badly. And it was hateful to see him burn them; all the more so because, instead of being angry and giving me the slating I deserved, he bore the pain like a hero, like a saint.'

'Ah—ah—ah,' murmured Madame Jacobini softly, in a falling cadence. 'You have decided against that one of the cross-roads, then?'

Mary raised her head.—'How can I help it, Sara?' she said. 'I care for him too much to think of marrying him.

'Heaven help us, what a reason!' cried Madame Jacobini. 'It is certainly left for the latter end of this marvellous nineteenth century to discover that affection is a valid argument against marriage.'

'It is quite true, though,' the girl said. 'I have thought it all out.'

'Ah! you all think too much!'

'It is only prudent to think,' Mary Crookenden answered. 'Supposing I did as he wants me to do, and then later found I was bored, how horrible for him! It is much kinder to make him rather unhappy now than run that risk. You see Lance is incapable of being bored. At the end of a hundred years he would be just as dear and kind, just as ready to indulge and take care of me, as he is now. There would be nothing accidental in the business. One would always know precisely where one was. I can map it all out—London, Slerracombe, Slerracombe, London; high respectability, a model *ménage*, Aunt Caroline's displeasure abating as time went on, and—and—as there came to be appeasing grandchildren; Lancelot irreproachable in every relation of life, and nothing, nothing to look forward to. Never the least ripple of adventure to stir the surface.'

Mary's head went down again on her friend's shoulder. —'Sara,' she said, 'I think there is nothing more beautiful than that sort of life; just husband and children, putting aside the development of one's own nature as some

women can, and using any gifts one may have simply to make one's people happy—merging all private ambition in ambition for the second generation. I am not sure that it is not the ideal for us women—what we were originally intended for. But though I admire it, I cannot rise to it.'

'You have thought it all out, indeed,' murmured Madame Jacobini.

'I am not equal to that—yet. To settle down to it is too great an act of self-abnegation. I dare not risk it—no, I daren't. Supposing, as I say, five or six years hence I found it intolerable? No, I can give no sufficient securities. It would be wicked to let Lancelot invest all his capital of future happiness in me. Don't you see that it would?'

'You are too logical,' the elder woman said, 'you are far too reasonable. You do not allow enough for modifications of time, of habit.'

'You mean, after a while, one would get conveniently dull, go round like a horse in a mill? I don't see the fun of condemning one's self to be a horse in a mill.'

'Are you not a little perverse, my dear?' inquired Madame Jacobini.

'Indeed, indeed, Sara, I am trying to do what is right,' Mary said in her grave tones. She raised her head, and kissed her friend's cheek.

Those kisses were very disarming. Madame Jacobini held the girl close and tenderly. She yearned over her,

she was distressed for her. For it seemed as though this young creature might have put to sea in such safe and pleasant sort, had she only been minded to do so; might have stepped on board a marriage-ship, furnished with sails of silk and masts of sandal, and made a life's voyage over such very tranquil and sunny waters. But she was not minded to do so. She asked excitement and adventure. Only too probably she would get them, for in the long run we all of us do get very much that which we ask. And when they came, in what spirit would she meet them? Madame Jacobini was sorry. But she did not protest. She had no faith in trying to make any one happy against his or her will.

'Well, we have disposed of one road, then,' she said presently; 'how about the others?'

Some time elapsed before the girl answered. She had drawn a little away, sat with her head bent, playing idly with the fan lying on the elder woman's lap. It cost her something to speak.

'Sara,' she began, getting at her point in a rather roundabout fashion, 'it is an admitted fact that I am changeable, isn't it?'

'Fully admitted, I think,' the other said, not without malice.

'Should you despise me very much if I acted up to my reputation, and threw over my work at the Connop School?'

Madame Jacobini was taken by surprise. She opened her mouth, and brought her teeth together with a slight snap. It was a snap of relief, of satisfaction.

'On the contrary, I shall be glad,' she answered. 'I never cared very enthusiastically about your going to the Connop School. And since the tame Tartar has been in possession, my last drop of enthusiasm, as I think you know, has evaporated.'

Mary drew away a trifle further.

'Mr. Colthurst has been very kind to me. He has taken a lot of pains with me. He has done all in his power to help me.'

'I can credit it,' Madame Jacobini exclaimed, not without irony.

'I shall always be grateful to him—always,' the girl continued.

'By all means, my dear. Gratitude for benefits received is most becoming. But one can imagine circumstances under which it is perhaps just as well cultivated at a distance from the benefactor.'

'You are very much prejudiced against Mr. Colthurst,' Mary said.

'I confess he has not taken me by storm on the three or four occasions when I have had the honour of encountering him.'

'He is very clever,' Mary said.

'In these days that is no distinction. Every one is clever—hideously, detestably clever.'

Miss Crookenden rose, and with a certain deliberation put another log on the fire. From among the glowing embers flames sprang up to meet it. The girl knelt on the fender-stool, watching the tongues as they licked greedily round the flaky edges of the wood.

'Most people's cleverness is merely a pose,' she said; 'it doesn't amount to much. It rubs off when you get to know them. We've all been clever because cleverness has happened to be the fashion lately. In a year or two the fashion will have gone out, and then we shall be gloriously stupid again.' She paused a minute. 'Mr. Colthurst's cleverness is not subject to fashion. It is ingrained. He can't help it. I don't believe he could be stupid even if he tried.'

'Poor man, how frightfully exhausting!' Madame Jacobini commented with feeling.

Mary still watched the tongues of flame clasping the wood.

'Yes, it is frightfully exhausting, too exhausting for me; and that is why I don't propose going back to the Connop School again. The demand he makes is too great; I am not equal to meeting it. I must give up trying to be modern, and professional, and all that. It is beyond me. Of course it is disappointing—tremendously disappointing—but I must resign myself to re-

entering the ranks of ordinary, common-place young womanhood.'

She stood up, her back to the fire, and her hands clasped rather tightly behind her.

'If I had courage and conviction enough to give myself over, and just submit to be taught—turn sponge and drink it all in, you know—I believe I might do a good deal under that fine teaching. But I have not the courage to turn sponge. There are foreign bodies in the water. I daren't drink them in. They're not good for me—or I imagine they are not. I get frightened.'

Mary paused again, and then laughed, with an effort to throw the whole matter aside. She was more affected than she cared to own. She did not want her friend to gauge the depth of her feeling. She did not enjoy plumbing that depth herself indeed. Accurate knowledge of it seemed to her to trench on danger.

'Oh! I am afraid I am a very twopenny-halfpenny sort of young person, after all, Sara,' she said, 'whose affairs don't merit any such careful consideration. I am feeble, deplorably feeble. That's the fact. I daren't take this risk, I daren't take the other—always a lion in the path. I shall end by muddling my life contemptibly before——'

And there she stopped abruptly.

Chapter III.

That Hannah, the parlour-maid, advanced salver in hand, on the salver a visiting-card, that this usually imperturbable handmaiden was slightly ruffled, none too well pleased with her commission—all this Madame Jacobini, from her station upon the sofa, saw clearly enough. It vexed her, for her head ached viciously and the pieties demanded seclusion. But she saw more than this, and for that overplus and extra Hannah's advent with the visiting-card appeared insufficient cause. Miss Crookenden's attitude was peculiar. She was looking towards the doorway. Madame Jacobini did not command a view of the doorway.

'Who on earth is it?' she exclaimed, suddenly becoming nervous. She had a conviction something was going to happen—something she should not the least like. 'Who on earth is it?' she repeated; but Mary did not answer.

The girl's features had stiffened, so, indeed, had her whole frame, with a sensation part resentment, part an emotion strangely vital and intimate. It was new to her. It angered her. It made her eyes dilate, and sent the blood tingling down to her finger-tips. And side by side with the anger a gladness—a gladness not without an element of alarm in it. She had no need to read the name on the visiting-card. The owner of both had followed

hard on the heels of the parlour-maid. And his high-shouldered figure was very evident now in the doorway, dark against the light of the stairway behind. Erect, the fingers of his left hand dragging at his shirt collar, Colthurst waited on the threshold, looking across the daintily-furnished, white and apricot-coloured rooms, with their bowls of violets set on quaint stands and tables, their tall bushes of tea-roses, their books, pictures, *bibelots*, their effect of graceful luxury, to where their fair young mistress stood before the dancing fire in her suit of fairy mail.

Madame Jacobini and Hannah spoke simultaneously.

'Who is it, Mary? Is there time for me to beat a retreat?'

'I said you were engaged, ma'am. But the gentleman insisted he must see you. He said he would not detain you.'

Hannah's tone was decidedly sniffy, heavily charged with self-defence.

Miss Crookenden glanced towards her friend. 'There's not time—I mean, please stay,' she said.

For the next few seconds Madame Jacobini's brain worked rather too fast for comfort, considering that same vicious headache. For as Colthurst crossed the room for the first time she measured the inherent weight and power of the man, became sensible of the engrossing, absorbing force that was in him—saw and felt him, not off the surface as she had done hitherto, but by the quickened

vision that comes often with a highly-strung condition of nerves. A headache may be a very illuminating medium through which to view matters sometimes. 'The creature reminds me of a whirlpool,' she thought.—'Woe to the woman who falls into it. She will spin and spin helplessly till she is swallowed up.'—And then she looked hard at Mary Crookenden. We have said Madame Jacobini's sense of drama was acute. Something in the girl's attitude, a strainedness, a sort of holding of herself down and in, which Madame Jacobini saw, or fancied she saw, caused her very acute discomfort.—'Good Heavens! poor, dear, foolish, unfortunate child,' she said to herself. The kindly-hearted woman was quite overcome, lost her *savoir faire*, lost her readiness of speech and action for the time being, leant back against the piled-up sofa cushions, a profound sense of regret upon her. Alack for that silken-sailed marriage-ship! Madame Jacobini would willingly, joyfully have given every penny she possessed to see the girl safely on board of it as Lancelot Crookenden's promised bride, still better as his wedded wife. Meanwhile, as I say, she lost her readiness. The crisis had come upon her with a rush. She could not tell how to act for the best, how to interfere. In her confusion she missed Colthurst's first words, failed to apprehend the purport of his rapid speech.

'You think I have no b-business here, Miss Crookenden,' he was saying, with disconcerting abruptness. 'I

seem to be guilty of an intrusion. I am afraid I did not stop to consider that carefully. It was necessary that I should ask your opinion about a matter of considerable importance to myself, and indirectly to others as well. As you were not at school to-day, I came off here as soon as I could get away.'

The substance of Colthurst's address was personal, but his manner of delivering it was impersonal. He had himself very well in hand. Notwithstanding the excitement generated in him by Mary Crookenden's presence, by the fact of finding himself here in her house and home, Colthurst managed to take up the purely official, dogmatic tone which he had preserved in his intercourse with her during the past eight or ten weeks. He wanted no melting. Melting was precisely that which would defeat his purpose in coming here. He was true to his singular declaration of yesterday. His will was firm against any lessening of the distance that divided him from Miss Crookenden. He looked at her as little as possible, nor did he look about him. This was an occasion when the perception of attractive external details was carefully to be avoided.

The girl had no answer to make to his statement. She motioned him towards the sofa.

'I think you know my friend, Madame Jacobini,' she said, as loftily as she could.

For Mary also wished to keep the tone of this interview down to the level of their ordinary intercourse. But that

queer gladness took part against her wishes, against her social sense. She made a brave stand; but from the first she had a disturbing suspicion that she was playing a losing game.

Colthurst bowed mechanically to the sofa and any body or thing that might happen to be on it. Then he addressed her again:—'The matter in question is this, Miss Crookenden. Sylvester has resigned. They have offered me the p-professorship. Shall I accept it?'

Mary hesitated. Her first instinct was to congratulate him. Her charming eyes kindled. Then prudence gained over sympathy.

'Really, I am quite incapable of giving an opinion on the subject,' she said, coldly. 'You must know best whether the appointment is likely to prove a help or a hindrance to you. I cannot judge.'—She clasped her hands again rather tight behind her.—'What have I to do with it? You have no right to make me responsible in such a serious matter, Mr. Colthurst.'

'Ah! but you must inevitably be responsible,' he exclaimed. 'You can't help it. I can't help it either. The whole question turns on your wishes, your desires.'

Colthurst spoke very fast—so fast that once more Madame Jacobini failed to catch his exact words. But she saw Mary lift her head as in proud annoyance, saw her eye-lids droop, and her face flush. The good woman sat on thorns. Yet what to do?—she asked herself in grow-

ing alarm—what had already taken place between them, and how far had it gone? She was all in the dark. She must wait on events, lest she should get hold of the stick disastrously by the wrong end and so make confusion worse confounded.

Colthurst, meanwhile, was sensible that he had slipped somewhat. He turned away, restlessly, took a small trefoil-tailed china monster—representation of the sacred dog Toh, plainest-headed among hounds—off the chimney-piece just behind him, and began twisting it about, gazing at its goggle eyes and benignly-grinning mouth. It steadied him to have something to handle, in a sense to torture. Inwardly he cursed the shrewd, kindly woman sitting on the sofa. If she would go, if she would only remove herself! But evidently she did not intend to remove herself, and he had a delicate thing to say to Miss Crookenden, a thing which might easily be misconstrued. It was almost impossible to say it before a third person. Yet he had come with the express purpose of saying it. He did not mean to depart until it had been said. But Madame Jacobini's silent inspection and observation harassed him. He was beginning to lose his nerve. So he determined to say it at once. He faced round, spoke louder and more deliberately, though in so doing he knew he risked an outbreak of stammering. If the woman would hear, well, let her hear, then—and make what she could of it.

'What I came to ask you is this,' he said. 'You have not been to the school to-day. I am afraid I have d-divined why you did not come. Social, conventional fetiches intruded themselves. They intimated that the Connop School might be an embarrassing, equivocal sort of place for you after—well, after what occurred yesterday. And you had not quite d-daring enough to defy the fetiches. Wasn't it so?'

Madame Jacobini leaned forward, fanning herself. She was all eyes and ears just then.

'Merciful powers! What next?' she ejaculated under her breath.

Colthurst was one of those inconvenient persons who have the gift of compelling you, willy nilly, to speak the truth.

'Yes, it was,' Mary Crookenden assented; while her glance followed the motions of the man's handsome hands playing in their neatly violent way with the little china monster.

'And the conventional fetiches were wrong, as they usually are, Miss Crookenden. Pray understand once and for all,' Colthurst said, quietly, 'that the very last thing I intend is to be a nuisance to you; to traffic on past kindness; to b-bore and pester you with my affairs, my susceptibilities, my attacks of blue devils. Gratitude is not always a lively sense of favours to come, though it may amuse cheap cynics to say so. I assure you I have a very sufficient capacity for holding my tongue if needs be.

Y-yesterday, I was p-pressed beyond endurance. I lost my head. But I shall not lose it again. I have taken measures to prevent the recurrence of the pressure of yesterday which I have no doubt will prove effectual.'

Colthurst paused a moment. His expression was not exactly saintly, and Madame Jacobini, glancing from the man to the girl as they stood together on the hearthrug, could not but be struck, in the midst of all her anxiety, by the telling contrast they offered. Light and darkness, night and morning, beauty and the beast. Nevertheless, she admitted a certain grandeur in the beast.

'So, in as far as I am concerned, in as far as your work at the Connop School is concerned, you can draw a wet sponge across your memories of yesterday—wipe them out, obliterate them, if you desire it.'

'Ah, but I can't do that,' the girl cried almost involuntarily.

Colthurst's breath came very short. His face grew thin as he looked at her, and the look was heavy with a question. But Mary had retreated upon the sofa. She leaned against the arm of it close to Madame Jacobini. Her back was to the light, her face and figure in shadow, only a yellow-red glint of the fire here and there upon the silver embroidery about the hem of her dress. Colthurst's fingers closed like a vice upon goggle-eyed Toh.

'Then it only remains for me to ask you to be so kind

as to tell me p-plainly whether my accepting the directorship of the school will prove an objection to your coming there in future? I shall be grateful if you will answer me frankly; b-because, if it proves so I shall decline the appointment.'

He said the last few words very simply. His taste may be called in question at times. His sincerity, I am happy to say, never. Yet it was no slight matter to him, that proposal to decline the appointment. For to-day had been big with triumph as yesterday with defeat. He had felt the pulse of his school to-day; found that it beat true, loyally, towards him. A deputation of students had waited upon him with enthusiastic demand that he would continue to reign over them. Much pleasing feeling had been exhibited towards him, many pleasant words spoken. For, indeed, it appeared to the majority of these sixty and odd young people that the daily routine of frog-pond existence would become deadly dull if King Stork should abdicate, and some good, ordinary, uneventful King Log mount the throne. King Stork might bully and overwork them; might be exacting and merciless; his criticisms might be harsh, even scathing; but he knew what he was about, and he made them know what they were about also. He managed to educe whatever fraction of cleverness might be in them. The spirit of discipleship was abroad in Connop School; they entreated him not to leave them. And the excellent Barwell seconded their vote of confidence

with much complimentary tail-wagging. Colthurst wore him nearly to fiddle-strings, it is true, as persons of strong vitality inevitably wear their weaker brethren. But wearing thin in a good cause appeared to Mr. Barwell of the nature of a privilege. Colthurst had come to form one of the principal interests of his life. Where would agreeable suspicion of adventure be, where those ticklings of surprise and wonder he so relished? He must bid good-bye to all hope of witnessing fireworks, sustaining electric shocks, if Colthurst ceased to rule over him. So he too cried, stay. Colthurst was touched, grateful. He rejoiced in his work, rejoiced to make his ideas obtain and prevail, rejoiced to be thus free to preach his gospel to fit audience; by no means despised either the certainty of a secure and, for himself, sufficient income. And so it was no light matter, surely, for him to come thus and offer to throw over all these alluring prospects to save chance of embarrassment to such a very impenetrable damsel as Miss Crookenden seemed bent on proving herself. Verily Love makes most thoroughpaced simpletons of the ablest among us; woefully perverts judgment, making the worst appear the better reason, making us fling aside indisputably solid advantages in favour of the shadow of the merest shade. How shall we regard you, Love? Shall we adore or detest you for this crazy miracle-working of yours? Is the madness you engender divine or brutish? Probably, rightly considered, something of both.

And now Colthurst, in obedience to that sweet madness, repeated his offer—making it, in itself, appear a small matter, thanks to the reasons he adduced in support of it—being filled, meanwhile, with the almost voluptuous sense of satisfaction which comes, at the first blush anyhow, from the performance of any genuine act of self-devotion.

'You have an unusual amount of talent,' he went on; 'and you owe it to yourself to give that talent the fullest training and exercise obtainable. It mustn't be balked, stunted, frustrated, as women's talents generally are, by inadequate teaching, by timid nasty-nice notions of the degree of knowledge which is safe and suitable for their sex. And that's why I have come to you now, Miss Crookenden. The Connop School is the only place here in England where your talent will receive anything like fair play. So you must stay there. And if my staying there too is an impediment, stands in the way of your staying'—Colthurst turned away and put the little china monster back on the chimney-piece—'very well, then, I must go,' he said. 'They'll easily fill my place. *Il n'y a pas d'homme nécessaire*, you know. So don't hesitate to say what you wish. Yes or no—it shall be just as you please.'

There was a momentary silence. Then Mary said gently, gravely—'You are very magnanimous.'

Once more Colthurst knew what it was to be content. 'Not so very magnanimous,' he answered, 'since in

pleasing you I take the very b-best possible means of pleasing myself.'

But here Madame Jacobini arose mentally from the state of prostration into which headache and the abnormal character, both of the visitor and his communications had plunged her.

'Plague the man, he becomes abominably attractive, abominably coercive,' she said to herself. 'This won't do. He must be snuffed out.'

She rallied her forces, marshalled her scattered wits, rushed in valiantly where angels—comprehending the whole drift of the business, as it is only civil to suppose that superior intelligences would—might have feared to tread.

'Oddly enough, we were just discussing this very question—weren't we, Mary?—when Mr. Colthurst was announced,' she declared briskly. 'The question of the prosecution of Miss Crookenden's studies, I mean, at the Connop School. I will tell you all about it, Mr. Colthurst. Miss Crookenden needs change; I have long thought so; now she admits it. We had agreed—hadn't we, Mary?—just arrived at the conclusion—' here Madame Jacobini reached up and patted the young lady's knee, as the latter leaned on the corner of the sofa, including her and the dark figure standing on the hearthrug, in one of her widest and most genial smiles—'just arrived at it when you, Mr. Colthurst, appeared so opportunely though unexpectedly

upon the scene. Just agreed that the time had come when the Connop School must be reckoned among the things of the past. Miss Crookenden has enjoyed her work there immensely,' she continued vivaciously leaning forward, nodding at Colthurst with imperturbable amiability—'haven't you, Mary? And no doubt profited by it also. That I take for granted under such able tuition. But even the most enjoyable things must come to an end, you know, Mr. Colthurst. There is a limit set to our most agreeable experiences.'

As she finished speaking, Madame Jacobini rose. She intended to snuff the man out, once and for all to show him his place; but it was not quite a nice thing to do. She could not help being sorry for him. Yet, as it had to be done, she proposed doing it thoroughly. Not a smoulder of red should be left in the wick.

'Miss Crookenden's connection with the Connop School is severed,' she went on, using her hands in a very telling bit of pantomime descriptive of cutting off uncommonly short. 'It is most courteous and considerate of you to call, Mr. Colthurst, and give us this information about your appointment.'—Madame Jacobini's smile widened, grew largely, richly genial.—'But you see, as far as Miss Crookenden enters into the question you have arrived the day after the fair. The case was already closed. The verdict, funnily enough, just given.—I am afraid it is rather late to offer you tea. It seems to have got dusk very

quickly to-night. Shall I ring for the lamps, Mary, as I am up?'

Madame Jacobini congratulated herself. She had handled the snuffers to some purpose this time, or she was very much mistaken. Had let the man down with a slam; soused him up to the neck in common-sense; had drawn his poison-fangs, and need have no further anxiety in shi direction, at present. She moved across to the bell. Hannah and lamps, she thought, would finish him off, complete his discomfiture.

Colthurst moved also. Came right in front of the girl, still leaning on the corner of the sofa, her slim grey form somewhat impalpable in the deepening twilight.

'G-good-bye, Miss Crookenden,' he stammered. 'Your friend has very kindly saved me from all possibility of misapprehension. Her explanation of the situation has b-been m-most masterly.'

Colthurst put two fingers inside his shirt-collar and wrenched it outward. He felt he had been fooled, shamed; and it made him a little mad to have his self-devotion flung back thus, like a dirty rag, in his face.

'I resign you to the undisturbed worship of the conventional fetiches—for that's what it really means, what it all really comes to,' he said, bitterly. 'Worship them in peace, supported by the approval of all right-minded persons of your acquaintance; selling, as such persons always press the artist to sell it, your birthright for a mess of paltry

social pottage. And yet I am sorry,' he added, with a sudden change of tone; 'very sorry. It seems a pity; for the social fetiches are secure of plenty of worshippers, any way, and you are capable of worshipping better things!'

'Ah! no,' Mary answered. 'You have over-rated me, you have romanced about me, you have—'

But here suddenly, her voice faltered, broke. She stood upright, stretched out her hands in swift violence of entreaty.

'Oh! leave me alone, please leave me alone,' she cried. 'You are too strong for me, too great for me. I can't cope with you. You bruise and hurt me. I lose my identity; you break me all to pieces. Leave me alone, oh, leave me alone, Mr. Colthurst,' she said.

Hannah and lights. The face of the woman he loved seen for an instant blanched, strangely troubled, piteous in its child-like distress. Then the open door, the chill of the spring evening in the lamp-lit street.

'D-damn doing right,' was what Colthurst said to himself.

And in the white and apricot-coloured room, meanwhile, a long silence. The two women sitting side by side again. Madame Jacobini was affected, slightly remorseful. She had snuffed the man out, disposed of him; but no, decidedly it was not a nice thing to do. Mary's silence disturbed her, moreover.

'Was I right, darling child?' she inquired at last.

'Quite right, Sara; but—but—' the girl shuddered,

and her breath caught hysterically, 'Oh! Sara, hold me tight. Love me, comfort me, I am very unhappy,' she said.

'My dear, my dear,' murmured Madame Jacobini. Then she determined to probe the wound and discover if it was of dangerous depth. So she asked the time-honoured, ever-recurring question, which, simple though it is, covers most of the misery of every woman's life:—'Do you care for him, Mary?'

'I don't know, I hope not, because it would be utterly useless for me to care.' Miss Crookenden spoke slowly, wearily. 'There is something behind, something horrible, tragic—I don't know what, and I would rather not know. He hinted at it yesterday.'

'Did he?' exclaimed Madame Jacobini.

Remorse vanished. She began to feel quite comfortable over her use of the snuffers. Again silence, broken only by the roll of carriages. At a house just across the street there was a dinner-party, matting let down over the pavement, an awning put out, a row of children and perambulators drawn up to right and left watching the arriving guests.

'He gives me a feeling nobody ever gave me before,' Mary went on presently.

'Does he?' murmured Madame Jacobini, with meaning.

'It is a terrible feeling, Sara. It scares me. I don't know where it would lead to.'—Mary pressed her face

against her friend's shoulder, and shuddered again.—'I must get rid of it, get rid of it at all costs. Sara, should you mind my going down to Brattleworthy to Uncle Kent? I know you don't care for the country till the year is well aired; but I could quite well go alone—with Chloe, I mean. I know I am cowardly, but I should be so thankful to get into the dear, clean restful country, where everything seems simple, less perplexed.'

'You shall start for anywhere—Central Asia by the night express, if that will make you happier. But Brattleworthy,' Madame Jacobini's eyebrows went well up into her hair, 'it is next door to Beera Mills and—my dear, I don't want to plague you by suggestions of further perplexity—but—*que faire?* It is useless to blink the truth. At Beera is the clerical Admirable Crichton waiting for his answer.'

'I have thought of all that. But perhaps he won't be at home. He's been a great deal at Aldham Revel since poor Lady Aldham's illness took this bad turn. Miss Aldham told me so yesterday.'

'Still, railways exist, I believe, and it is open to him to take a ticket and come home again. He will come home again,' Madame Jacobini added with conviction, 'and that promptly, when he learns you are at Brattleworthy. Don't lay the flattering unction to your soul, that you are going to slip out of making an answer, Mary. You gave him a note-of-hand, payable at seven months. The young

man is punctual. He is not in the very least likely to forget to ask for a settlement.'

'Oh! very well then, let him ask for it.'

Mary kissed her friend lightly on the cheek. She had recovered her composure. She left the sofa, went over and knelt on the fender-stool, watching the now bright fire; up-leaping flames once more eagerly clasping the flaky edges of the wood.

'I don't mind if he does ask for it, Sara,' she said quietly. 'Indeed, I am not sure that I should not be rather obliged to him if he did. For, of all the various lions, the one in that path really seems to me the least dangerous and objectionable.'—She paused a minute.—'I am not at all sure Mr. Aldham is not part of the restfulness. There are no hidden things in his life I dare not know. If he still wants me he may have me—for he gives me no feelings.'

'Good heavens!' cried Madame Jacobini, 'there is another of your perverted nineteenth-centuryisms! It has indeed been left for modernity to discover an argument in favour of a suitor's eligibility in the fact that he leaves you as cold as a stone.'

Miss Crookenden ignored the small sarcasm.

'He is good,' she continued, 'and not at all stupid. Marrying him would be remarkably safe, and just now I have a perfectly gluttonous appetite for safety.'—She put her hands on to the mantelshelf, and drew herself up into a standing

position.—'I'll telegraph to Uncle Kent to-morrow, and go down the day after, if you really don't mind.—Dear me, there's the gong. Don't you bother about dressing, Sara, you're tired; and I won't be five minutes hustling into my frock.'

Just then her eyes lighted on dog Toh, lying grinning on the mantelshelf—dog Toh in two pieces, snapped right across his sacred middle. Mary started, and that odd shuddering ran through her once more, while the colour rushed into her face. She was angry with herself, yet an unreasoning gladness re-awoke in her. Then, very carefully, she picked up the pieces.

'Ah! he's broken,' she said. 'I must stick him together again.'

And she carried goggle-eyed dog Toh away with her up to her room. From which may it not be surmised that Madame Jacobini's use of the snuffers came a trifle—just a trifle—late?

Chapter IV.

It was Easter Eve. The sea like a great pale turquoise the sky like a great pale sapphire; their meeting veiled in banks of opalescent mist, fading almost imperceptibly into the opaque blue below and the clear blue above. The bare treeless land across Yeomouth Bay, where it rose above

the mist, a mosaic of frail yellowish pink, lilac, yellowish dun. A little fleet of white-sailed coasting vessels standing out to sea, till the flowing tide should serve to carry them in over the bar to the broad still reaches of the estuary. Along the bar a broken line of butter-coloured sand-hills edging the blue water. At the far end of them the lighthouse, showing like a splash of whitewash against the warm lilac of the hilly country inland—which rises, one swelling upland above another, to the wide quiet of the purple moor.

All this Cyprian Aldham saw as he turned out of the steep lane on to the high road at Beera Cross—saw it with the approbation beautiful scenery invariably called forth in him. But he did not linger. He had no inclination this afternoon for brooding intercourse with Nature. He took in the fair land- and sea-scape at a glance, and let it hang in the background of his mind as a pleasing and therefore suitable drop-scene against which the drama of his thoughts and affairs might play itself out undisturbed. For aspects of Nature were an accessory to-day, and the private concerns of Cyprian Aldham undoubtedly occupied the first place in Cyprian Aldham's attention. Moreover, he was in a hurry—in as much, that is, of a hurry as a person of so cool, direct, and well-regulated nature can be. Evening service in the small church clinging against the wooded combe-side was at seven o'clock, and it was nearly four now. Aldham proposed walking to Brattleworthy

Rectory, and being back in decent time for the said service. He could not therefore afford to loiter. He stepped out at a good pace along the high road,—here bordered by strips of coarse grass and heather, interspersed with little thickets of bramble and blackthorn, of willow in full glory of furry grey and yellow catkins, of stunted oaks and hazels; and shut in, on either hand, by high earth-banks topped with gorse and gemmed with innumerable primroses.

The air was light, exercise pleasant, and Aldham in that condition of serene self-complacency which serves persons of refinement and high cultivation in lieu of the vulgar animal spirits common to low-caste humanity. And indeed the young man had very fair cause for self-complacency. He had long purposed certain things, and in the last week had realized that which he purposed. Three days ago, without marked enthusiasm, it is true, but also without hesitation, Mary Crookenden had accepted him, had definitely promised to become his wife. Aldham was in love, genuinely in love, according to his capacity of loving. That capacity is, of course, very different in different individuals, and his capacity was not that of a St. Preux any more than of a Don Juan. His was a perfectly sane affection, not a bit likely to get out of hand, kick over the traces, indulge in violences and eccentricities of devotion. It was the sincere preference of a proud and perhaps hard man for one woman as distinct from

all other women, though he did not for a moment profess to think the woman in question a perfect being. On the contrary, Aldham considered that his mistress was not insusceptible of improvement in many directions. Some men's love is formative, educative; is convinced, not only of the high desirability, but of its own entire capacity, of adding finishing touches to the mind and character of the beloved one. Aldham acknowledged many duties on the part of the husband to the wife.—Let it not be supposed for an instant that I refer to such crudities of right conduct as being faithful to and not beating her. They belong to a level of practical morality, or rather immorality, to which the young clergyman was incapable of descending, even in thought. The duties he acknowledged were of a much more civilized order.—Aldham, believing sincerely in the superiority of the masculine intelligence, proposed to mould his wife, to modify some of her tendencies, root out some of her inclinations, teach her much that it would be greatly to her advantage to know. His judgment would be her final court of appeal; his wishes in all serious matters her rule and law. The time was young yet, but Mary had displayed a degree of gentle submission towards him during the last few days which was altogether flattering and encouraging to his educative hopes and intentions.

'I have been wise,' he said to himself, bestowing a glance on the blue of the bay over the top of a gate as he

passed. 'She asked me to wait, and I waited. I was very patient, and I did right. Now her choice is deliberate. I think we fully understand one another.'

Bold words, betraying perhaps a measure of inexperience in our admirable young clergyman. For do two human beings—specially of opposite sex—ever fully understand one another? Have any two ever done so since the world began? History and personal observation alike answer in the negative, I fear; for, alas! the finest and liveliest imagination stops short of complete comprehension of the thoughts, aims, predilections, of even the nearest and best loved. For is not each one of us, after all, under sentence of something very like perpetual solitary confinement in the prison-house of our own individuality?

But it was not only that Cyprian Aldham had attained in the matter of his annexation of Miss Crookenden. That morning he had heard of the death of his aunt, Lady Aldham, and this event made a considerable difference in his prospects. Cyprian felt at liberty to contemplate the poor lady's death chiefly from the standpoint of his own fortunes; for it had been long expected, in a sense long hoped for, and might justly be considered to be what is often rather euphemistically described as a 'happy release.' Over fifty years of easy comfort, of the sheltered existence wherein no rough word is ever heard or rough sight seen, all the luxuries of the harem, in short, without its

disabilities and restrictions—for, upon my word, it sometimes occurs to one that women of the upper classes here in England often have a quite unreasonably good time of it—this followed by a strange reverse, by six months of such pain and disgust as give the lie to human progress and laugh the efforts of our vaunted science to scorn. Disease is a famous leveller. Neither wit nor virtue, neither wealth nor position, houses or land, move Siva the Destroyer to spare when he is minded to strike. He sends out his emissaries, and they do his bidding relentlessly. In this case he ordained that a delicately-nurtured woman should die of cancer, and of cancer she accordingly died. But the process was a slow one,—the gods can afford to take their time, having all eternity at their disposal,—and during the process certain changes took place in the poor lady's attitude of mind.

Like so many charming women of her class, Lady Aldham was undisciplined, and consequently slightly vindictive, unreasonable, unjust. The demands upon her forbearance and submission having been rare, those graces had grown somewhat rusty, and failed to present themselves in good working order when Providence mercifully supplied her with an opportunity for their employment. She had, for many years now, been offered such an opportunity in relation to her husband's nephew and heir, Cyprian Aldham. For the young man's existence was, in plain English, a perpetual vexation to her; he had

embodied, to her, the great disappointment of her life. She had gone on hoping against hope for the child who would render his claims abortive. But the child never came. Cyprian, meanwhile, certainly was not guilty of intruding himself, his behaviour was laudably circumspect; but Lady Aldham found offence in his very circumspection. It irritated her. He put forth no claims, gave himself no airs of a moneyed young man; worked hard, took a good degree; went into the Church; was licensed to a London curacy very much more distinguished for its opportunities of labour than for its social advantages; broke down in health; went abroad as bear-leader to Lancelot Crookenden; buried himself in an obscure West Country parish. Had he been obsequious, had he flattered a little, made up to the poor lady, she would probably have forgiven him the iniquity of his existence; but the independence he showed was merely a fault the more. To many women it is the unpardonable sin that you should give them no trouble, keep out of their way, be quite well able to do without them.

But when Siva stretched out his hand against her, as we have said, Lady Aldham's attitude of mind changed. She desired to make her peace with the young man; but she desired something more than this. She loved her husband jealously, exclusively. And Sir Reginald was a handsome, jovial, vigorous, middle-aged gentleman, tender-hearted and light-hearted at the same time. He was

inconsolable for his wife's sufferings, prospectively inconsolable for her loss; but Lady Aldham had a terrible suspicion that the Inconsolable eventually of necessity seek consolation, just as surely as the Thirsty seek water. It is the moderate griefs that wear long, that kill—if, indeed, any griefs kill—not the noisy ones. Suppose Sir Reginald should seek consolation in the form of a second helpmeet? Suppose he should pay his wife the compliment—we are assured it is a high one—of giving her a successor? Suppose that successor should triumph where she had so lamentably failed? Suppose children's toys should one day litter the great stately rooms downstairs, children's shouts and laughter echo along the wide passages? Such thoughts, to Lady Aldham, were almost more cruel than the hand of Siva pressing on her poor tortured body. And being a woman of sincere though not very enlarged belief, she went a step further, asking the question asked by the Sadducees in Judea of old.—At the last, when they met again in that other world which was now drawing so solemnly near to her—coming forth out of the silence and mystery which had heretofore shrouded it, and confronting her as her only permanent reality—whose husband would Reginald be? To whom would he belong, this man whom she had loved, whose name she had borne? To her, or to that other Lady Aldham? Put baldly thus, such questionings sound almost grotesque. Yet these are the things the

majority of us really do brood over, turn hither and thither with weariful persistence, as we lie a-dying—carrying on, in queer, not unpathetic simplicity, all the familiar furniture of our daily thought, what one may call the small-clothes of our domestic and social circumstance, into the unknown regions ahead, where such little garments are probably very much out of fashion.

And so from a double motive she proceeded to make her peace with Cyprian Aldham. In proportion as Sir Reginald cared for his heir-presumptive, he would be unlikely to run the chance of dispossessing him by marrying again. From being an object of dislike, the young clergyman found himself suddenly converted into an object of high consideration. He regarded this as a not unfitting reward for his past conduct, accepted it gladly as such; ministered to the poor lady in things spiritual in perfet good faith, having no notion that he was being erected as a barrier against the intrusion of some not impossible second Lady Aldham. For the present owner of that title could not bring herself to speak of the jealous fears that beset her. Moreover, she read the young man's character clearly enough to see that an appeal to self-interest would certainly not succeed with him. So she took refuge in committing the keeping of her husband's soul to him as a sacred trust. Even humbled herself, asking as pledge of forgiveness for past coldness that he would spend the greater part of his time in future at

Aldham Revel. 'Marry and live with your uncle, save him from a lonely old age,' this was the woman's cry. Inwardly she added, 'save me from the humiliation, the agony of a supplanter.' She pressed the matter upon her husband, referred to it again and again, until the idea of such an arrangement became familiar to both gentlemen.

And it is odd how soon the mind accustoms itself to some new ideas. A year ago, had anyone suggested to Aldham he would contemplate giving up clerical work, and settling down as recognized heir-apparent to a big estate and big fortune, he would have repudiated the suggestion almost angrily. But now it had ceased to be in the least shocking to him; indeed, during the brief period of his engagement it had grown increasingly attractive. Aldham Revel would unquestionably be a very much more suitable setting for Mary Crookenden than the dull little vicarage at Beera. How Sir Reginald would admire her! How she would impress the neighbourhood—the dear, dignified old Mainwarings, the Selfords, the Adnitts of Lowcote, good-natured Mrs. Jack Enderby and her train of strapping boys and girls at Bassett Darcy; and the airified pleasure-seeking little world of Tullingworth, always sitting on the edge of its chair—though it doesn't a bit like one to say so—in hopes of recognition from 'the county.'

Now to-day, along with the announcement of his wife's death, had come a kindly word from Sir Reginald concerning his nephew's engagement and a renewal of the request

that he would pack up and betake himself to Aldham Revel, bringing his bride along with him. 'You know how much your poor dear aunt thought about it,' he wrote. 'Almost the last talk I had with her she spoke of it. The notion had taken great hold of her, somehow. I hope you will see your way to carrying out her wishes.'

As he turned down over the top of Brattleworthy Hill, between the straggling row of whitewashed, slate-roofed cottages, Aldham was decidedly of opinion that he did see his way to carry out the said wishes. The period of doubt and indecision was passed. He could find a hundred-and-one excellent reasons for accepting the agreeable station in life to which it appeared to be the pleasure of Providence to call him. When inclination jumps with fate conscientious scruples are soon stilled, as a rule.

Passing beyond the cottages, Aldham opened a field gate on the right and struck across the steep pastures. Below him lay the church and rectory half hidden by a plantation of oak and beech which shelters them from the west; the square mass of Slerracombe House; the diversified expanse of the park—its wooded valleys a patchwork of raw umber, rosy brown, ethereal green, lying between stretches of heather, golden gorse, succulent fresh-sprung bracken;—then the turquoise sea meeting the sapphire sky amid banks of opalescent mist, and the finely-tinted mosaic of far-away country. About half a mile out from shore some black-hulled skiffs from Beera, all, even to tan

top-sails set to catch the light south-easterly breeze, heeling a little as they slipped along with the quaint curtseying motion which comes of the pull-back of the heavy trawl at the stern. Jackdaws and choughs, showing like a handful of glossy black seed thrown upward as they suddenly wheeled out in shrill vociferous companies from their nesting-places in the cliff face. Deer moving down from the open grass park near the house, to the mottled sunlight and shade of the valleys. A couple of buzzards soaring up and up in intersecting circles, on motionless, wide-spread, blunt-tipped wings. The 'wandering voice' of the first cuckoo, bold and blithe, in pertinacious repetition of his own gay name. And there, finally, fairest sight of all—for, as has been said, the young man was truly in love according to his capacity—on the high rising ridge of the next field, just before him, Mary Crookenden herself.

Aldham did not stay to open the gate. He laid his hand on the top bar and vaulted over it, performing this athletic feat very neatly. Not without inward sense of satisfaction, too, for he was glad to know himself to be in as good condition physically as he was well assured of being intellectually and morally. Aldham dearly liked to have the whole of himself at command. He pushed on and was more than half way up the slope of turf before Mary became aware of his presence. Then, catching sight of him, she waved her hand and stood awaiting his approach.

To Cyprian her solitary white-clad figure—the curious in

costume may be interested in learning that she wore a dress of white flannel—outlined against the sky, bare-headed, the sunshine lighting up the dim gold of her hair, seemed to gather up and embody the sweet, pure influences of that spring day. She appeared as very fit presiding genius of the bright, far-reaching landscape; while a charm of bird notes rose about her from thicket and woodland, and the soft breeze stirred her garments, swept away through the rectory plantation just below, and filled the sails of those curtseying skiffs out at sea. Aldham had an admirably retentive memory. He quoted some lines from Wordsworth, some from Matthew Arnold; and sincerely congratulated himself at the same time, on his excellent taste in the choice of a wife. His mental barometer stood as 'set fair.'

Nor was Mary's greeting calculated to depress the mercury. She was gentle; her graciousness had a pretty touch of deprecation in it. She seemed genuinely anxious to meet his wishes. She listened dutifully to all he had to say, admitting, when any slight difference of opinion arose, the justice of his arguments. All of which was just as it should be, the educative, formative process happily inaugurating itself thus early in their joint career. Aldham was extremely pleased. He had hardly reckoned upon such docility on the part of his pupil. He enjoyed a most satisfactory three-quarters of an hour walking up and down the rectory pasture in the sunshine, refused tea, and started back in capital time for

his evening service as well satisfied a young man of high culture and clear intentions as you are likely to meet.

The result of the interview may be stated briefly thus. The wedding, for which no date had as yet been fixed, was to take place in June—about six weeks hence. It was to be quite quiet, in respect for Lady Aldham's recent death. After a short honeymoon, Cyprian and his wife would take up their residence at Aldham Revel. On Tuesday he would go to the latter place to attend the funeral; Mary would travel up to London with him, and turn her attention seriously to the important matter of her trousseau. If Kent Crookenden could be prevailed upon to do so, he should go too, and then all business regarding settlements could be disposed of.

'Really it is delightful to find we understand each other so thoroughly,' Aldham said to himself as he followed the lane leading into the mile-long combe down to Beera again. 'Ah, good evening to you, Parris,' he added.

But Bill Parris, on his way to a preaching up at the dreary little hamlet of Codd's Camp—in honour of which pious exercise he had put a remarkably short-waisted, full-skirted, shiny black broad-cloth coat over his canvas trousers and jersey—vouchsafed no intelligible response to this greeting. With his lazy rolling gait he lounged on, his hands in his pocket, and wild blue eyes fixed on the turn of the steep lane just ahead. Yet presumably he did recognise Mr. Aldham, and remembered moreover certain

news concerning that gentleman current in Beera, of which his sister, Mrs. Sarah Jane Kingdon, had informed him that very morning, for he muttered as he went :—

'Marryin', marryin' and giving in marriage—same tale now as back along in the days of the patriarch Noah. But the Lord'll reward mun for their foolishness and the hardness of their hearts. He shall overthrow the ivory palaces in which they trust, and cast mun out into the wilderness. There shall be wailin' and gnashing of teeth. And the saints shall rejoice against mun, and laugh mun to scorn. Praise the Lord,' he said, 'He'll bring down the pride of the lot of 'em and drag it in the dust.'

END OF VOL. II.

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